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ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

INTENDED TO HAVE BEEN DELIVERED

IN

Philadelphia.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

SOME OTHERS, SELECTED FROM THE SAME AUTHOR.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L. L. D. F. R. S.

Northumberland:

PRINTED BY JOHN BINNS.

1805.

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ON

THE DUTY

of

MUTUAL EXHORTATION.

Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. HEB. III. 13.

THIS advice of the author of this epistle is not less seasonable at the present day than when it was given. It is even more deserving of attention now than it was then. At that time the christian church was in a state of persecution At least the open profession of christianity was attended with more danger than it is at present. It was not then patronized by the great, the learned, or the fashionable; but was a *sect every where spoken against*, and the teachers of it were generally considered as *men who turned the world upside down*, the enemies of peace, and the authors of innovation and revolution.

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world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.

In order to feel, and consequently to act, as becomes a christian, and this in an uniform and steady manner, the principles of christianity must be attended to, and never lost sight of. In time of persecution the distinction between christians and other persons who are not christians is constantly kept up. For then the mere profession of christianity makes men liable to suffering, and often to death; and when men are in danger of suffering for any thing, as well as when they have the hope of gaining by any thing, they will give the closest attention to it. Their hopes or their fears cannot fail to keep their attention sufficiently awake.

When a man is willing to give up his property, and even his life, for the sake of any thing, he must set a high value upon it. He will cherish the thought of it, as what is dearer to him than any thing else. In such times, therefore, no man would for a moment forget that he was a christian.

The

The precepts and maxims of christianity would be familiar to his mind, and have the greatest weight with him.

But this is not the case in such times as these in which we live. There is very little in a man's outward circumstances depending on his being a christian or no christian. The behaviour of other persons toward him has no relation to that distinction; so that he has nothing either to hope or to fear from the consideration of it, there being nothing that necessarily forces, or that very loudly calls for, his attention to it. All the attention that, in these circumstances, he does give to it must be wholly voluntary, the spontaneous effort of his own mind. If his mind be much occupied by other things, he will necessarily relax in that attention, and if he intirely drop his attention to the principles of christianity; if all his thoughts, and all his actions, be directed to other objects, such as engage the attention and the pursuit of mere men of the world, there will be no real difference between him and mere men of the world. Pleasure, ambition, or gain, will be equally their principal objects, those for the sake of which they would sacrifice every thing else.

Christianity does not operate as a charm. The use of it does not resemble that of a badge, or a certificate, to entitle a man to any privilege. It is of no use but so far as it enters into the sentiments, contributes to form the habits, and direct the conduct, of men; and to do this, it must really occupy the mind, and engage its closest attention; so that the maxims of it may instantly occur the moment that they are called for; and therefore in whatever it be that the true christian and the mere man of the world really differ, the difference could not fail to appear. If there was any gratification or pursuit, that did not suit the christian character, though others might indulge in it without scruple, and despise all who did not; the true christian would be unmoved by such examples, or such ridicule. His habitual fear of God, and his respect for the commands of Christ, will at all times render him superior to any such influence. Whatever his christian principles called him to do, or to suffer, he would be at all times ready to obey the call.

For any principles to have their practical influence, they must at least be familiar to the mind, and this they cannot be unless they be voluntarily cherished there, and be dwelt upon with pleasure,

when

when other objects do not necessarily obtrude themselves. Consider, then, how many objects are perpetually occupying the minds of men in the present state of things in the christian world, and how forcible their hold is upon them, and consequently how difficult it must be to prevent their all prevailing influence, to the exclusion of that of christianity.

I. The age in which we live, more than any that have preceded it, may be said to be the age of *trade and commerce.* Great wealth is chiefly to be acquired by this means. It is, at least, the most expeditious way of acquiring a fortune, with any regard to the principles of honour, and honesty. But to succeed to any great extent in mercantile business of any kind, especially now that such numbers of active and sensible men are engaged in the same, a man must give almost his whole attention to it, so that there will be little room for any thing else to occupy his mind. If he do not literally, in the language of scripture, *rise up early, and sit up late,* it will occupy his thoughts when his head is upon his pillow. His anxiety will often keep him awake. Even at that season of rest he will be considering whether it will be prudent to make this or that purchase, whether this or that

man may be safely trusted, whether there will not be too much hazard in this or that undertaking, and a thousand things of this nature.

If such a person's business allow him any leisure, he is fatigued, and wants amusement, and cannot bear any thing that makes him serious. He therefore, engages in parties of pleasure, and various entertainments, that even more than business exclude all thoughts of religion. And in this course of alternate business and mere amusement or feasting, do many men of business proceed day after day, and year after year, till christianity is as foreign to their thoughts as if they had been heathens.

If the man of business have any turn for reading, and that not for mere amusement, it is history, or politics, something relating to the topics of the day, but not the Bible that he reads. To this, if he have not read it at school, many a man of business is an utter stranger; and though in this book God himself speaks to men, concerning their most important interests, their duties here, and their expectations hereafter, they will not listen even to their maker. On Sundays, which the laws of most christian countries prevent men from giving to business, many never go to any place of christian worship;

but

but to relieve themselves from the fatigues of the week, make that their day of regular excursion, in company with persons of similar occupations; and their conversation, if not irreligious and profane, is at least on topics altogether foreign to religion.

II. The business of *agriculture* is much less unfavourable to religion and devotion. It does not occupy the mind in the same degree; and it is attended with much less anxiety. Nay the principal causes of anxiety to the cultivator of the ground, viz. the uncertainty of the seasons, and the weather, rather lead the thoughts to God, the author of nature, and of all its laws; from which he expects every thing that is favourable to his employment; and he passes his time in the constant view of the works of God; so that they must in some measure engage his attention. And if he attend at all to the objects with which he is continually surrounded, they must excite his admiration and devotion. This at least, is their natural tendency; though even here other objects, and other views, foreign to his proper employment, may interfere; so that, in the language of scripture, *seeing he shall not see, and hearing he shall not understand;* and giving more attention to gain than to his employment in any other view, even the farmer may be as

destitute of religion as the tradesman; and great numbers, no doubt, are so. This however is by no means owing to their employment, but to other influences, which affect all men alike, without distinction of classes or ranks. This employment I therefore consider, as of all others, the most favourable to the temper and spirit of christianity.

III. In this advanced state of the world, and of society, the profession of *law* and *medicine* require more study and time than formerly. Laws are necessarily multiplied, and cases more complicated. The study of medicine requires more knowledge of various branches of science, as natural philosophy, chemistry, and botany, besides a knowledge of the learned languages, and other articles with which no physician of eminence can be unacquainted. Whether it be owing to these circumstances, or to any other, it is remarked in England, and I believe in Europe in general, that but few either of lawyers or physicians are men of religion, tho' some few are eminently so. Physicians have an obvious excuse for not regularly attending places of public worship; and if men can spend the sundays without any exercise of religion, the whole week will generally pass without any, and the subject itself will find little place in their thoughts.

IV. The

IV. The times in which we live may, in a very remarkable degree, be said to be the age of *Politics*, and from the very extraordinary state of the world it is in some degree necessarily so. Greater events are now depending than any that the history of any former age can shew; and the theory and practice of the internal government of countries, the circumstances that tend to make governments stable, and the people prosperous and happy, concerning which there is endless room for difference of opinion, occupy the thoughts of all men who are capable of any reflection. No person can even read the common newspapers, or see any mixed company, without entering into them. He will, of course, form his own opinion of public men and public measures; and if they be different from those of his neighbours, the subjects will be discussed, and sometimes without that temper which the discussion of all subjects of importance requires. Consequently, the subject of Politics, in the present state of things, is with many as much an enemy to religion, as trade and commerce, or any other pursuit by which men gain a livelihood. Many persons who read find nothing that interests them but what relates to the events of the time, or the politics of the day.

This

This state of things might lead men to look to the hand of God, and a particular Providence, which is evidently bringing about a state of things far exceeding in magnitude and importance, any thing that the present or any former generation of men has seen. And a person of an habitually pious disposition, who regards the hand of God in every thing, will not take up a newspaper without reflecting that he is going to see what God has wrought; and considering what it is that he is apparently about to work. To him whatever wishes he may, from his imperfect view of things, indulge himself in (which however will always be with moderation and submission) all news is good news. Every event that has actually taken place, as it could not have been without the permission (which is in fact the appointment) of God, he is persuaded is that which was most fit and proper for the circumstances, and will lead to the best end; and that tho' for the present it may be calamitous, the final issue, he cannot doubt, will be happy.

But mere men of the world look no farther than to men, tho' they are no more than instruments in the hand of God; and consequently, as the events are pleasing or displeasing to them, promising

ing or unpromising, their hopes and fears, their affections or dislikes, are excited to the greatest degree; so as often to banish all tranquillity of mind, and cool reflection. And certainly, a mind in this state is not the proper seat of religion and devotion. All the thoughts of such persons are engaged, and their whole minds are occupied by objects, which not only exclude christianity, but such as inspire a temper the very reverse of that of a christian, which is peculiarly meek, benevolent, even to enemies, and heavenly minded, a disposition of mind which we should in vain look for in the eager politician of these times.

As to those who are concerned in conducting the business of politics, those in whose hands God has more immediately placed the fate of nations, it is not to be expected (though there are noble exceptions) that they will be eminent for piety and religion, or have any other objects than those of ambition, and, often that of avarice. Their eagerness to get into power, their jealousy of all their opponents who wish to support them at home, and their negotiations with foreign powers, which must be intricate, must often keep their minds upon the rack, to the exclusion of every sentiment, not only of religion, but even of common justice

and

and humanity. For such all history shews to have been the character of the generality of statesmen and warriors, in all ages, and all nations. They have kept the world in the same state of ferment and disorder with their own minds. The consolation of a christian, in this state of things, is that the great Being, whose providence statesmen seldom respect, does, tho' with a hand unseen, direct all the affairs of men. *He ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he pleases;* and even the Pharaoh's, and Nebuchadnezzars, are as useful instruments in his hands as the Davids, and the Solomons.

V. It might be thought that *philosophers*, persons dayly conversant in the study of nature, must be devout; And the poet Young says *an undevout astronomer is mad;* Yet we see in fact that men may be so busy all their lives in the investigation of second causes, as intirely to overlook the great first cause of all, and even to deny that any such Being exists. Or seeing no change in the course of nature at present, or in any late period, they hastily conclude that all things have ever been as they now are from the beginning; so that if the race of men had a maker, he has ceased to give any attention to them, or their conduct; and consequenly that

they

they are at full liberty to consult their own interest, and live as they please, without any regard to him. Also philosophers, having all the passions of other men, the same love of pleasure, the same ardour of ambition, and the same attachment to gain, that actuate other men, they have in these respects been, in the usual course of their lives, governed by passion more than reason, and have lived as much *without God in the world*, as thoughtless of his being, perfections, and providence, as other men.

VI. Even ministers of the christian religion, though necessarily employed in the public offices of it, and i teaching the principles of it to others, are not necessarily influenced by them themselves; though the character they sustain in society obliges them to greater external decency of conduct; so as to lay them under some considerable restraint, at least will respect to a love of pleasure, and a taste for amusement. But if the profession was not the real object of their choice, from a sense of its superior excellence, even this duty may be discharged as any other task, as any other means of subsistence, or on account of some other advantages to be derived from it. In some cases, in which religion is supported by the state, and ample emoluments are within the reach of churchmen, the christian ministry

nistry (if in such a case it can be so called) may be chosen as the means of gratifying men's ambition or avarice.

In this state of things can we wonder at the progress of infidelity? Those who are entire strangers to it see that it has little influence on the hearts and lives of those with whom they converse, so that whether it be true or false, they think it to be of little consequence, and not worth the trouble of a serious investigation. And many persons who had nominally christian parents, giving no more serious attention to christianity than they see their parents and others give to it, observing none of its exercises, or only in the most superficial manner, seldom attending public worship, never reading the scriptures, or any book relating to religion, either explaining its evidences, or enforcing its duties, which they find to interfere with their inclinations, get a dislike to the subject; and in this state of mind a mere cavil, or a jest, such as are to be found in the writings of Voltaire, and other modern unbelievers, has the force of argument. With many persons too in the upper ranks of life, christianity being the belief of the common people, on whom they look down with contempt, has more weight in their rejection of it than they will

will acknowledge, or than they may even be aware of themselves.

Now, as I observed before, christianity, tho' not absolutely and expressly rejected, is of no *use* unless it influence the temper of our minds, and our conduct in life; if it lays no restraint on the love of pleasure, the love of gain, or the pursuits of ambition, but leaves men as worldly minded in all respects as those who never heard of it; as much as if they had never heard of that future state which is brought to light by it, and which in the gospel is held up as a constant and most interesting object of attention and contemplation to all christians. We should never forget that religion is only a *means* to a certain *end;* and if we do not make this use of it, it would have been better for us never to have had it, or to have known it; since then we should have had one talent less than we now have to be accountable for. And if it be true that God has revealed his will to men, and sent messenger after messenger to promote the virtue and happiness of his rational offspring, he knew that such an extraordinary dispensation was necessary for us, and we cannot be innocent if we neglect to attend to it, and to make the proper use of it; un-

less we be so situated, as never to have heard of it.

Such are the general causes of the prevailing inattention to the subject of religion, and which extinguishes in so great a degree the genuine spirit of christianity. These, therefore, in proportion to the value we set upon our religion, and in proportion to the concern we have for our own improvement and that of others, we must endeavour, by every means in our power, to counteract, *exhorting one another daily while it is called to day*, lest we be carried away by the baneful torrent, which we see to be in danger of deluging, as we may say, a great part of the nominally christian world.

The means by which this may be done are sufficiently obvious. It is the application of them only that, in such an age as this, has any real difficulty in it. And certainly it requires no small degree of fortitude and resolution to appear so singular as a sincere and zealous christian must some times do among persons of a different character. He must be content to be thought *righteous over much*, to be considered as a man of a weak mind, and devoid of spirit, and of those qualities which recommend men to the admiration of the world. For tho' virtue, as it is commonly understood, has the sanction of general

neral estimation, and persons accounted vicious are universally censured; the virtues that are most admired are not always christian virtues, and give more indulgence to the passions, as to those of revenge, and a love of what is called pleasure, of various kinds, than christianity allows. And there is not perhaps any vice besides that of a mean selfishness, that is equally condemned by christianity and the voice of the world. We see that even murder, in the form of a duel, passes without any censure at all. Nay, the spirit with which men fight duels is applauded; while that meekneess, though it be real magnanimity, showing a due command of temper, which overlooks insults, and preserves a kindness for those who offer them, is branded as meanness of spirit. Voluptuousness to a really criminal excess passes with so light a censure, that when any person is said to be *no man's enemy but his own*, he is not thought at all the worse of on that account, especially as it is often accompanied with a contempt of money, and a love of society like his own. Profaneness is too generally considered as no vice at all, but only at the worst a foolish and unmeaning custom.

In these circumstances, a profound reverence for the name and attributes of God, the great duty of

not living to ourselves, but of the appropriation of the whole of a man's time, fortune, and ability of every kind, to the good of others, the love of God with the whole heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, including in the word neighbour every person to whom it is in our power to render any service; the obligation of sacrificing every thing in life, and even of life itself, for the sake of conscience, in the cause of truth and right, with a view to a recompence not in this world but another, which christianity requires of us, are things quite above the comprehension of mankind in general. And whatever men cannot attain themselves, they think to be romantic and absurd, a kind of quixotism in morals, and a just object of ridicule and contempt.

Since, then, what is called *the world*, and the prevailing maxims and custom of the times in which we live, give us no assistance, but must operate as an impediment in our christian course, we must surmount this great difficulty by our own voluntary exertions, taking to our aid those helps by which christian principles are most effectually impressed, and kept in view. Something of this kind is absolutely necessary, because no end can be gained without employing the proper means; and if any thing that does not necessarily obtrude

itself

itself requires to be *attended* to, it must be purposely brought before the mind by reflection, reading, or conversation; to do this most effectually, some *time* must be set apart for the purpose. Also those intervals of time which are not engaged by necessary business should not be wholly given to mere amusement (though something of this kind is necessary for such beings as we are) but be employed to some serious purpose.

David said that he meditated upon God *in the night watches, and upon his bed.* In the law of God, he says that a good man will *meditate day and night.* And whatever it be that we really take pleasure in, it will naturally occur to our thoughts when they are not necessarily occupied by other things; being the most pleasing subjects of contemplation. The first exercise therefore that I would recommend to all christians in the frequent reading of the scriptures.

Christians have far more, and more interesting, subjects of contemplation and meditation than David had. We see much farther than he could do into the great plan of providence, respecting the present and future condition of man. We are acquainted with many more instances of his inter-

ecurse with mankind, with more communications of his will; and a far more clear and explicit account of his designs respecting them. And what can be more interesting to man than his intercourse with his maker, the great being on whom we constantly depend, *for life, breath, and all things*, who is also our moral governor, and our final judge?

Since the time of David there has been a long succession of prophets, and especially the appearance of the greatest of all the prophets, Jesus Christ, who *brought life and immortality to light*, having not only given us certain information concerning a resurrection, and a future state, but exemplifying his doctrine in his own person, by actually dying and rising from the dead. There was also a most glorious display of divine interpositions in the time of the apostles, by which our faith in the gospel is abundantly confirmed, and our attention to a future state so much excited, that it might almost have been feared, that mankind would think of little else, and that the business of this life would have been too much neglected. For what is the interest we take in all other histories compared to our interest in this? Other histories are no doubt, instructive; but the books of scripture, besides being infinitely

finitely more curious, and interesting, as the transactions of *God*, compared with those of *men*, may be said to be a title to an estate, to which any man may become an heir. In the scripture we are informed of the certainty, and the value, of this great inheritance, and with the terms on which we may secure the possession of it. The books of scripture are also the most ancient writings in the world, and penned with a simplicity of which we have no other example so strikingly beautiful; and they exhibit the manners of the primitive ages of mankind; so that there is in them every thing that can interest curiosity, as well as impart the most important information.

If, however, notwithstanding these recommendations, the scriptures, and other works illustrative of their contents, have not engaged the attention, it behoves every person who really wishes to imbibe the spirit of christianity, to make himself well acquainted with them, and to persist in the reading and study of them, till he find himself interested in their contents, and imbibe the pious and benevolent temper which is so conspicuous in the writers. And how irksome soever, through disuse, and other causes, the reading of the scriptures, and of other books which have the same tendency, may for some time

be, perseverance will overcome it; and then, if I may speak from experience, no reading will be so interesting or pleasing; and the satisfaction will increase with every fresh perusal.

This circumstance enables us to account for the peculiar pleasure that David, and other pious Jews, appear to have derived from reading the scriptures. They had few other books; so that if they read at all, they must have read them perpetually in their own houses, as well as have heard them constantly read in the synagogues, from the time that they had such places of public worship, which they certainly had from the time of the Babylonish captivity. At this day there are so many other books to engage the attention, that in too many cases they totally exclude the reading of that which is of infinitely more value than all the rest.

But whatever be the leisure that any person can command for reading, some portion of it should by all means be appropriated to that kind of reading the object of which is to increase the knowledge which relates to our profession as christians. And this will lead to a course of reading both curious and interesting, especially such as makes us acquainted with the progress of christianity in the world. No kind of reading tends so much to counteract the influence

of

of the world, and its principles, as the lives of eminent christians, and most of all the martyrs, whose piety, patience, and fortitude, in chearfully abandoning life, and every thing in it, for the sake of conscience, cannot fail to inspire something of the same excellent spirit; and this once fully imbibed, will enable a man to behave as becomes a christian in every situation, of prosperity as well as of adversity, in life or in death.

Compared to the strong feelings with which such works as these are read by persons who have acquired a true relish for them, all other reading is perfectly insipid, and a truly pious christian, who has few books besides the Bible, has little cause to envy the man of letters, in whose ample library the bible is not to be found. What is there of pathetic address in all the writings of the admired antients compared to the book of Deuteronomy by Moses? And what is all their poetry compared to the psalms of David, and some parts of Isaiah? And yet such is the power of association and habit, that by persons of a different education, and turn of mind, those parts of scripture which are by some read with emotions of the most exalted and pleasurable kind, will be perused with perfect indifference, and even disgust: and if such persons

be advanced in life, so that their habits are confirmed, the endeavour to communicate to them a relish for such writings will be altogether in vain. Of such persons we may say with Bacon's brazen statue, *Time is past.*

So strongly is my mind impressed with a sense of the importace of the habitual reading of the scriptures, both from considering the nature of the thing, and from the best attention that I have been able to give to particular characters and facts, that I do not see how those persons who neglect it, and who have no satisfaction in habitually meditating on the infinitely important subjects to which they relate, can be said to have any thing of christianity besides the name. They cannot feel the influence of its doctrines, its precepts, or its motives, when they give no attention to them; and therefore they cannot derive any advantage from christianity, except such as accrues to all the nominally christianized part of the world, in improving the general character, manners, and customs of it; but which, as it has not arisen from any attention that they have given to it, cannot entitle them to the character, or rewards of true christians, those who have lived as pilgrims and strangers here below, and as citizens of heaven, who, though living in the

the world, have had their affections on things above, whose treasure, the object of their chief care and pursuit, has been not in the things of this world, but in heaven. They may not be rejected by Christ as *workers of iniquity;* but they have no title to the appellation of *good and faithful servants*, to a master whom they have never truly loved or respected, and hardly even thought of, and therefore cannot expect to partake in the joy of their Lord.

II. Besides other obvious uses of public worship, a person who wishes to cultivate the true spirit, and acquire the proper habits of his religion, must not neglect it. We are social beings, and our joining in any scheme in which we are alike interested, is a mutual encouragement to persevere in it, and to pursue it with proper ardour. It likewise operates as a tie not lightly to desert the profession, and such a tie men concerned in the multifarious business of this life often want.

III. Private and habitual devotion is the life and soul of all practical religion. No man can be truly religious who does not, in his daily thoughts, respect the presence and government of God, and who does not regard him as the author of all things,

and

and the sovereign disposer of all events; so as to *live as seeing him who is invisible*; as I have explained pretty much at large in a printed discourse on this subject.

IV. Family prayer, if not of absolute necessity, is of great use in all christian families. Dr. Hartley, one of the most judicious, as well of the most pious of men, says *observation on man vol.* 2. p. 336, "I belive it may be laid down as a certain "fact, that no master or mistress of a family can "have a true concern for religion, or be a child of "God, who does not take care to worship God by "family prayer. Let the observation of the fact "determine." I would not chuse to express myself quite in this manner, since much must be allowed to the different circumstances of families; but thus much may certainly be said with truth, that if the practice of family prayer, or any other mode in which we give evidence to the world that we are christians, be forborn through shame, or a compliance with the modes of the world, we have no just claim to the title and privilege of christians, but fall under the awful sentence of Christ. *If any man be ashamed of me, and my words, in this generation, of him will the son of man be ashamed when he*

he comes in the glory of his father, with the holy angels, Mark 8. 38.

Every practice by which we declare our belief of christianity, such as attending christian worship, receiving the Lord's supper; or performing any other acknowledged christian duty, tends to strengthen our faith, to inspire the proper spirit of the profession, and secure the performance of every duty which it enjoins; and therefore should by no means be neglected by us.

Thus should we be urgent, even to *exhort one-another*, and all should gladly and thankfully *receive the word of exhortation;* to *be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*

The author of this epistle says (Ch. 10. 25.) We should exhort one another *so much the more as we see the day*, meaning, no doubt, the great day or the second coming of Christ, *approaching*. If this motive had weight in the times of the apostles, it must have more now; since that great day, which *will try every man's work what it is*, must be nearer than it was then; and though this time was not known to our Lord himself, but only the signs of its approach, many intelligent christians, who are attentive

attentive to the *signs of the times*, are of opinion that it cannot now be far distant, and may be expected even in the present generation. But since the coming is certain, though the time be uncertain, let us all be *ready*, that *when our Lord, shall return, and take account of his servants, we may be found without spot, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

ON

ON

FAITH AND PATIENCE.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. HEB. XI. 13.

THE great use of religion is to enlarge the minds of men; leading them to look beyond themselves, and beyond the present moment; to take an interest in the concerns of others, and to look forward to the most distant times. By this means men become less selfish, and at the same time more intellectual; being less governed by the impulses of mere sensual appetite, which is the characteristic of brutal nature, and also of a state of childhood.

This habit of mind cannot be imparted by instruction It must necessarily be the fruit of experience. And since this advance in intellectual improve-

ment implies the forbearance of immediate gratification, which is always painful, a state of suffering is an essential ingredient in this important discipline of the mind, and therefore ought not by any means to be complained of, by those who wish not to retard their progress towards perfection.

We see in the affections and conduct of children how injurious constant indulgence is to them, and how necessary to their own future happiness, as well as to the comfort of those who are about them, are frequent checks and restraints. The less is the gratification of their wishes restrained, the more eager are their desires, and the more confident their expectation of any desired event; and consequently the more painful is disappointment to them. And since disappointment will necessarily come, from the absolute impossibility of gratifying all their absurd wishes, the more they must suffer from impatience and vexation in consequence of a want of early checks.

It is happy for men that, in a state of infancy, they cannot explain their wants; so that whatever they feel or wish, it has little or no connection with what they experience. They must necessarily be many years under the absolute government of others. This lays a foundation for a habit of patience

patience and forbearance, which is of infinite value to them, and which must be carried much farther as they advance in life, if they advance in intellectual and moral improvement.

We see not only in the case of indulged children, but in that of kings, and others who have many persons intirely subservient to them, that a habit of indulgence makes them incapable of brooking disappointments; so that they suffer infinitely more than persons who frequently meet with them, and who have by that means acquired a meek disposition, and a habit of patience and forbearance. These persons can enjoy the pleasures of life without suffering much from the evils of it; whereas they who have not been in a situation proper for acquiring this habit, not only suffer much from evil; but have little enjoyment even of good. This being nothing more than they always expect, and what from frequent indulgence they receive with much indifference, often bordering on disgust.

Hence it follows that, in exercising the faith and patience of men, God acts the part of a kind and judicious parent, attentive to the improvement of his children; not affected by their present temporary feelings, but consulting their happiness at a future

period, and in the whole of their existence; this life, long as it may be, being only the infancy of man, in which are to be formed habits that are to qualify them for superior and more lasting enjoyment hereafter. Compared to eternity, what is time? what is the longest term of human life? If the whole of it should be passed in suffering, there is room for an abundant recompence in a future state. But our merciful father has given sufficient proof of his benevolence in the provision that he has made for the enjoyment of this life, happiness greatly exceeding the misery that is so much complained of in it. From this his disposition, and his wish, to make his offspring happy is sufficiently evident; and we have just ground to hope, and believe, that all the sufferings of this life are in their nature preparatory to our happiness in another, provided they have their proper effect upon our tempers and dispositions.

We see most of the conduct of divine providence in the scriptures, which are eminently calculated for our instruction; and we there see that the methods of the extraordinary providence of God, in his intercourse with mankind, is exactly correspondent, to the plan of his general providence. We there

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see that from the beginning of the world he has been training men to virtue and happiness by a course of severe but salutary discipline; some of the most eminent of our race, those whom we may call the greatest favourites of heaven, with whose history we are best acquainted, having been treated in such a manner as to exercise their patience to the utmost, before they were distinguished by any reward for it. As an attention to particular cases, such as are briefly recited in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, will be eminently instructive, I shall enlarge a little on some of them, noticing such circumstances in their history as appear to be the most remarkable.

Abraham, at the age of seventy five, was commanded by God to leave his native country, on a promise that he would give him another which he would shew him, and that he would make his descendants a great nation. Accordingly, he left Chaldea, and went to Haran in Mesopotamia and the year following he proceeded to the land of Canaan, Gen. XII. 4. There God appeared to him the second time, telling him that that was the country destined for him. Ten years, however, passed without the appearance of any issue, from which the promised

promised nation was to descend; and in the mean time he had been obliged by a grievous famine to go into Egypt.'

At his return the promise of his descendants becoming a great nation was renewed, and again, in a peculiarly solemn manner, after his rescue of Lot; but having no hope of any son by his wife Sarah, he was prevailed upon by her to take her maid Hagar, and by her he had Ishmael, when he was eighty-six years old. But this was not the son from whom the great nation was to descend; and it was not till he had arrived at the advanced age of ninety nine that he was promised to have a son by Sarah, who was then ninety; so that her conception was out of the course of nature. Notwithstanding this long delay, and the most unpromising appearances, his faith did not fail; and on this account he was highly approved by God, Gen. XV. 6. Accordingly he had a son the year following, but only one; so that, to all appearance, his having a numerous posterity was very uncertain.

To give the greater exercise to his faith, when this son, so long expected, was arrived at years of maturity, the affectionate father received a command from God to sacrifice him; a command which he hesitated not to obey, though to appear-

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ance this act of obedience would put an end to all his flattering prospects. This, however, was merely a trial of his faith, and the order to sacrifice his son was countermanded.

When Isaac was forty year old, and his father one hundred and forty, he was married; but twenty years more elapsed before he had a son, so that Abraham was one hundred and sixty years old, and saw no more than two grand children, and when they were boys of fifteen he died. His expectation, therefore, of a numerous posterity could not have arisen from any thing that he saw, but altogether from his faith in the divine promise.

After this the hopes of the family, were limited to Jacob one of the sons of Isaac; and he did not marry till he was near fourscore years of age, and at his outset he appeared to have been greatly inferior to his brother. For when he returned from Padan Aram no mention is made but of his wives, his children, and his cattle, whereas his brother met with him with four hundred men, and made very light of the very valuable present that Jacob forced upon his acceptance.

In the family of Jacob we see, however, at length, the rudiments of a clan, or nation; and

when they went into Egypt they mustered seventy males, but their situation in servitude, to which they were soon reduced, was very unpromising with respect to any future greatness. The life of Jacob himself had little in it to be envied. After leaving his parents, where though he was the favourite of the mother, he was by no means so of the father, he served his uncle Laban twenty years; and by his own account he underwent great hardships, and was grievously imposed upon. At his return he suffered much from the fear of his brother's resentment. The behaviour of several of his sons must have been a source of much affliction to him, and the loss of Joseph must have gone near to break his heart. In this state he continued fifteen years, when near the close of his life he was comforted by the recovery of his favorite son, and the settlement of all his family in a plentiful country. But though he knew, from the warning that God gave to Abraham, that his descendants would soon be reduced to a state of great oppression, and would continue in it many years, he died in the firmest faith that they would in future time become a great and flourishing nation; and he distinctly foretold the fate of each of his sons, as the heads of great tribes, of which that of Judah would be the most distinguished.

Joseph

Joseph, the most pious and virtuous of his sons, was exercised in the severest manner. After being the favourite of his father till he had attained the age of seventeen, he was sold for a slave; and, in consequence of a false accusation, confined in prison several years. But these unfavourable circumstances were probably those that contributed most to the peculiar excellencies of his character; disposing him to be humble and serious, wholly resigned to the will of God; and believing that his providence had the disposal of every thing, he entertained no sentiment of revenge on account of the injuries that had been done to him. Looking forward to the future greatness of his descendants, and confiding in the divine promise, that the family would become possessed of the land of Canaan, he ordered that he should not be buried in Egypt, but be embalmed, in order to be carried to the promised land when they should remove thither.

Though the descendants of Jacob multiplied greatly in Egypt; yet no person, seeing the state of abject servitude to which they were there reduced, could have imagined that they were destined to rise superior to their proud masters, and make the figure they afterwards did under David and Solomon, and much less that they would become the

most distinguished of all nations, which if the predictions concerning them have their accomplishment, they are to be. The Israelites in general seem to have abandoned all hopes of the kind, and to have acquiesced, through despair, in their servile condition.

Moses, their future deliverer, fled from the country at the age of forty, and continued forty years more among the Arabs, where he married, and evidently never thought of returning to join his brethren; when the divine Being appeared in a most extraordinary manner in their favour, delivering them as it is said, *with a high hand and an outstretched arm*, from the power of the Egyptians, at a time when there were no visible means of accomplishing it.

But though the nation was in this extraordinary manner delivered from their state of servitude in Egypt, yet, wandering as they did no less than forty years in the wilderness, surrounded by warlike nations, they could not, except in reliance on the divine favour by which they were conducted, have expected to make the conquest of such a country as Palestine then was, fully peopled, and by nations in the habits of war, with all their considerable towns

fortified

fortified: Yet in this manner was the favourite nation training up for their future greatness, when, to an indifferent spectator, their condition would have appeared very uncertain and hazardous; not likely to make any greater figure than one of the hordes of Arabs, and having nothing but the very worst and least cultivable part of Arabia to settle in; every fertile spot in the country being already occupied.

The people in general at this time thought so ill of their situation and prospects, that nothing but very extraordinary interpositions in their favour could have prevented their returning into Egypt, which they again and again wished to do. The faith, however, of the more pious among them never failed; and after the expiration of the forty years they were put into the possession of a considerable tract of country on the East of the river Jordan. But at this time not only were the descendants of Esau a well settled and considerable nation, but even those of Moab and Ammon, the two sons of Lot, though they were destined to bow to the superiority of the wandering Israelites.

After they got possession of the land of Canaan, in a manner as extraordinary as their emancipation from their bondage in Egypt, they made no consi-

derable figure for the space of about four hundred years; and during a great part of it they were in subjection to some or other of the neighbouring nations, in consequence of their apostacy from their religion; so that in all this time there was far from being any appearance of their being what they were in the reigns of David and Solomon; and this state of prosperity did not continue quite a century. After this they relapsed into their former inconsiderable state, and they were finally conquered, and carried into captivity, by the kings of Assyria and Babylon; when to all appearance there was an end of the nation of the Israelites, as there was to those of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Philistines, which never rose to any degree of power or independence.

Of all the kings of Israel, David, whose piety was most exemplary, though, from the strength of his passions, his failings were very great, was exercised with the greatest trials, both before he was king and afterwards, of which many of his psalms, composed in a mournful strain, are a sufficient evidence. He was anointed king of Israel when he was very young; but though he soon distinguished himself as a warrior, he was immediately exposed to the jealousy and persecution of Saul; so that during

during the remainder of his reign he was obliged to take refuge in the neighbouring countries; and after the death of Saul he was seven years at Hebron, acknowledged by the tribe of Judah only.

On the other hand, Solomon, who had, no doubt, every possible advantage of education, and arrived at the most splendid situation without any difficulty, was not only excessively luxurious, but swerved from his duty in an article with respect to which his firmness might have been least of all suspected; not only indulging his wives in the idolatrous worship of the countries from which he had taken them, but joining them in it.

After this seeming annihilation of the Israelites as a nation in the captivity by Nebuchadnezzar they were, according to express prophecies, restored to their own country, though they never rose to the height from which they had fallen; and in consequence of their relapsing into vice, though not into idolatry, and rejecting the great prophet Jesus Christ, the vengeance predicted long before by Moses came upon them to the uttermost. They were conquered by the Romans, and soon after intirely driven from their country to every part of the habitable world; and in this state they remain to this day

day, but they are not destroyed. They preserve their peculiar customs, and never lose sight of their relation to their great ancestors, or the promises of God to them, that they are to be once more, and finally, settled in their own country, and to be the most respectable of all nations. Though they are treated with the greatest contempt by all other people, they are justly proud of their descent, and of their peculiar relation to God. Whatever be the vices with which they are chargeable, they are not deficient with respect to faith. Their most necessary virtue is fully exercised, and improved, by the severe discipline to which they have been subjected.

This is the more remarkable, as none of all their calculations, or conjectures, concerning the time of their deliverance and exaltation have been verified; so that they now desist from forming any opinion on the subject, but wait with patience for the accomplishment of the promises, notwithstanding the most discouraging aspect of things, and in perfect uncertainty will respect to the time.

The Messiah, who was first promised to them with any distinctness in the time of Isaiah, they fully expected, from their interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel, about the commencement of the christian æra, when they became subject to the Romans;

Romans; a situation which they brooked very ill. Jesus was the predicted Messiah, but his first coming was not to be that glorious one with which they fondly flattered themselves. And with respect to his second coming christians themselves have their faith as much exercised as is that of the Jews. It was by many fully expected soon after the age of the apostles. After this disappointment, they fixed upon later dates; but, like the Jews, we have flattered and deceived ourselves again and again. Our faith, however, does not fail, especially as our Saviour has apprized us that the time of his second coming was not known even to himself, but to the father only; and that when it will come it will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night.

If the faith of the founders of the Jewish nation, and that of the nation itself, has been so much exercised, that of Jesus Christ and his followers has been no less so. Christ himself was *made perfect through suffering*, Heb. II. 10. his followers cannot reasonably expect to be trained to virtue and happiness in any other way. He was *despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* During the whole course of his benevolent ministry, in which he continually *went about doing good*, he met with more opposition from the envy and

and malice of his powerful enemies, than if he had been the pest of society. Though he gave the rulers of his nation no cause of offence besides that of reproving them for their vices, they never ceased to persecute him till they had put him to a painful and ignominious death; and he faithfully apprized all his disciples, that if they would follow him, they must *take up their cross to do it;* and that they would be *hated of all men for his name's sake*, but that they ought to rejoice in being so distinguished; since in consequence of being *persecuted for righteousness sake, great would be their reward in heaven.* If they *suffered, with him, they would, as the apostle says, reign with him, and be glorified together.*

The apostles, and the primitive christians in general, found this to be a faithful and true warning. In following the steps of their master they were persecuted as he had been; and christians received no countenance from the powers of the world for the space of three hundred years. And after this the professors of a purer christianity (for it was never more than a corrupt species of it that was patronized by princes and states) continued to be exposed to cruel persecution in various forms. Indeed they [illegible] much more from nominal christian powers than

than they had ever done from the heathen ones. It has, therefore, been true in all times, that *through much tribulation men have entered into the kingdom of God;* and consequently whenever the world smiles upon us, there is just ground for suspicion that all is not right with us.

Looking through the history of christianity from the beginning, we shall find that the most distinguished characters, those we look up to with the greatest reverence, as patterns of piety, benevolence, and constancy, have been those who have suffered the most. This was eminently the case of the apostles in general, and especially of Paul, the most active of all the propagators of christianity. For ardour of mind, and indefatigable exertion in the cause of truth and virtue, he stands unequalled in christian history. But what did he not suffer after he embraced christianity, from the malice of the Jews, and false brethren among christians.

Speaking of some who undervalued him in the church of Corinth, he gives the following brief enumeration of his labours and sufferings, Cor. XI. 23. *Are they ministers of Christ, I speak as a fool, I am more. In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

one. Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once was I stoned. Thrice I suffered shipwreck. And this was written before the shipwreck of which a particular account is given in his history. *A night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea. In fastings often, in cold and nakedness, besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory in the things that concern my infirmities.* After this he was imprisoned two years in Judea, conveyed to Rome as a prisoner, and suffered shipwreck at Melita. He was two years more a prisoner in Rome, though not in strait confinement; and though he was at that time acquitted, he afterwards suffered martyrdom.

In the same epistle, however, in which he gives this account of his sufferings, he say 2 Cor. VII. 4. *I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation;* and he frequently exhorts the christians to whom he writes to *rejoice in the Lord always.* Rom. XII. 12. *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation.* When he

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was preaching to some of the churches in Asia Minor, (Acts XIV. 22.) exhorting the disciples to continue in the faith, he reminds them that *through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God.*

With what true heroism and satisfaction does he reflect upon his labours and sufferings, in the epistles which he wrote from Rome, towards the close of his life, and when he was in expectation of a violent death. In these circumstances he thus writes to Timothy. 2 Tim. IV. 5. *Watch thou in all things. Endure affliction. Do the work of an Evangelist. Make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.*

Can any thing now be wanting to reconcile us to any hardships to which we can ever be exposed, either in the ordinary course of providence, or in the cause of truth and a good conscience? What is all that we can suffer, in these times of rest from open persecution, compared to that to which either the

antient martyrs in the time of heathens, or those in the time of popery, were continually exposed. How many thousands of them suffered death in every frightful form, besides being the objects of ridicule and insult, as if instead of being the benefactors of mankind, they had been the greatest pests of society; a treatment which to many persons is more painful than death itself, and very often would be intolerable, were it not that the attachment of friends is a balance to the contempt of enemies.

It is true, however, that something of this kind of persecution still remains to those who resolutely bear their testimony, at the same time in favour of christianity, and against the manifold corruptions of it, with nominal christians, even those who call themselves *reformed*. In this case we cannot expect to escape the ridicule of the philosophical part of the world on the one hand, and the hatred of bigots on the other. In some situations it requires no small degree of fortitude to bear this with a temper becoming christians, pitying the ignorance and prejudices of men, without bearing them any ill will; and taking every method of removing their ignorance and prejudices, in a manner the least offensive to them; always joining the wisdom of the serpent, to the innocence of the dove; the seriousness of

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the christian, with the ease and cheerfulness of the benevolent man; free from that offensive austerity which gives many persons an aversion to religion, as if it was an enemy to human happiness, and the parent of gloom and melancholy.

Let us more particularly apply this doctrine to the great object of christian hope, the second coming of Christ with power and great glory, to raise the dead and to judge the world, when he will render to every man according to his works. We are apprized by the apostle Peter. (2 Peter III. 3.) that in *the last days, there will be scoffers*, as we now find, *who will say Where is the promise of his coming? For, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.* But, as he observes, *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, that *he is not slack concerning his promise*, and *that day will come though as a thief in the night.*

Let us then be ever *looking for*, as we are *hasting unto*, the *coming of this great day of God; and be diligent, that we may be found of him without spot and blameless.* That greatest of all events is not the less certain for being delayed beyond our expectati-

on. The Israelites, no doubt, expected to enter the promised land immediately after their leaving Egypt; but though they passed forty years in the wilderness, they nevertheless were put in the full possession of it when that time of their probation was expired; so that we read, Josh. XXI. 43. *The Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers. There failed not one of the good things which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel: all came to pass.* In like manner, no doubt, we shall all have occasion to say the same in due time, when our eyes, and every eye, shall see Christ coming in the clouds of heaven, be the distance of that time from the present ever so great. Let us, therefore, live as if it was near at hand. With this prospect before us, *what manner of persons*, as the apostle Peter says, *ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

But, as individuals, we have no occasion to enter into any speculations about the time of this greatest of all events, in which we are so much interested. To each of us it must be very near. For since we have no perception of time during a profound sleep, we shall have none while we are in the grave. The sleep of Adam will appear to him to have been as short as that of those who shall die the day before the

the second coming of Christ. In both cases, alike, it will be as a moment; so that our resurrection will seem immediately to succeed the closing of our eyes on this world. What a sublime and interesting consideration is this. For *what is our life*, but, as the apostle says, *like a vapour, which appears for a little time and then vanishes away;* and immediately after this the great scene opens upon us. May we all be so prepared for it, that when our Lord shall return, and *take account of his servants, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

ON

DS.

ON THE CHANGE WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES AFTER THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

[PART I.]

And when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

ACTS IV. 13.

THERE is nothing in all history, and certainly nothing within the compass of our own observation and experience, that shows so great a change in the views and characters of men, as we find to have taken place in the apostles after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, or rather after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They appear to have always been honest, virtuous, and pious men; but having imbibed the prejudices of their nation, they expected a temporal prince in their Messiah; and supposing their master to be

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that Messiah, and being in favour with him, they, with the ambition that seems to be natural to all men, hoped to be advanced to the first places in his kingdom, and, seemingly, without considering whether they were qualified to fill them or not.

With these views, and no higher, they attached themselves to Jesus, after being convinced by his miracles that he was a true prophet; and conceived the idea, though without its having been suggested by himself, that he was the Messiah they were looking for. They had frequent disputes among themselves on this subject; and two of them were so impatient, and presumed so much on their superior merit, that, without regarding the offence it would necessarily give to the other apostles, they actually applied to Jesus for the distinction of sitting the one on his right hand and the other on his left, when he should be in the possession of his kingdom.

Though Jesus never failed to repress these ambitious views, and never gave the least encouragement to them in any of the apostles, not even in Peter, whose pretensions seem to have been the best founded, they all retained this idea till the time of his death. This event so contrary to their

expectations, disconcerted and confounded them, and necessarily obliged them to give up all their fond expectations of worldly preferment. But after his resurrection their ambition revived, and they could not forbear to ask him (Acts I. 6.) if he would then restore the kingdom to Israel, expecting, no doubt, to share in the honours and emoluments of it.

That he was destined to be a king, and they were to partake of the honours of his kingdom, he had never denied. Nay he had given them positive assurance of it, saying (Matt. XIX. 28.) that "when he should sit upon the throne of his glory, "they should also sit upon twelve thrones, judg-"ing the twelve tribes of Israel." But at the same time he gave them sufficient intimation that his kingdom was not to resemble the kingdoms of this world, in which the great mass of the people were subservient to the gratification of a few. For that, on the contrary, the persons the most distinguished in his kingdom would be those who should be the most assiduous to promote the happiness of others, or that they would be in fact in the capacity of *servants*, as he himself in reality was.

Whether they clearly understood his meaning does

does not appear, but it is probable they did not. For still their chief expectations were confined to the honour and advantage that would accrue to themselves, without attending to any obligation they would be under to promote the good of others. Whatever was meant by this kingdom, in the honours of which they were to partake, he never gave them any information concerning the *time* of its commencement. Nay, he expressly told them that this was not known even to himself. After his resurrection he professed the same ignorance, and, repressing their curiosity on that subject, he said "it was not for them to know the times and seasons "which God had reserved to himself. Acts I. 9.

Reflection, however, on the death of their master, on his resurrection and ascension, without his having given them any promise of his speedy return, and the recollection of the persecutions to which he had constantly apprized them they would be exposed, as that "they would be hated of all men for "his name's sake, and that they who should kill "them would think they did God service," could not fail to satisfy them that they had nothing of advantage to look for in this life; and therefore that the kingdom which he had promised them, and of

the *certainty* of which they entertained no doubt, must be in another after death. And when, after this, they found themselves impowered to work miracles as Jesus had done, in confirmation of his doctrine, they, naturally timid as they had been before, assumed the courage of the antient prophets, no more overawed by men in power than they or their master had been, and making light of, nay glorying in, all the sufferings to which they were exposed.

This natural effect of their new situation, and new and more enlarged views, astonished their adversaries, who wondered how men in some of the lower classes of life, without fortune or education, should appear so fearless; and, without respecting any human authority, despising their threats, and their punishments, boldly preach what they thought themselves authorized by God to do, though in the most peremptory manner forbidden by them.

From this time, also, so far were they from envying one another, or contending, as they had done before, about the chief places in their master's kingdom; having now no distinct idea of any difference that would be made among them hereafter, they considered one another as brethren, standing in the same relation to their common master; and being equally

equally exposed to persecution on that account, their attachment to one another was such as the world had never seen before. Remembering at the same time the great stress that their master had laid on *brotherly love*, and the mutual kind offices that flowed from it; and considering all the things of this world as wholly insignificant in comparison with their glorious expectations in another, many of them made no difficulty, in the first ardour inspired by their situation, of giving up all their worldly property to those of their brethren who stood in need of it, in sure expectation of receiving their reward in heaven.

This most remarkable and sudden, and yet permanent, change in the temper and disposition of the apostles, and other primitive christians, furnishes no inconsiderable evidence of the truth of christianity, as it implies the fullest possible conviction in their minds of the truth of the great facts on which it depends; the facts which immediately preceded this change, and must have been the proper cause of it, and they were certainly the best judges in the case. If they had not all known, to the greatest certainty, that Jesus was actually risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and that the

powers

powers with which he had been endued were transferred to them, they must have been the same men that they were before, acting upon the same principles, and in the same manner, especially as they were not very young men, and some of them pretty far advanced in life. Consequently, their worldly ambition, and their envy and jealousy of each other, must have been the same that it had been before. Whereas now we find every thing of this kind quite changed, and this change was not momentary, but continued through life with them all. The low passions and narrow views, and their consequent envy and jealousy, never returned, but they continued to the latest period of life what they appear to have been presently after the remarkable events above mentioned.

That such men as they evidently were, and especially in the middle and lower classes of life, unlearned, and so many of them, should concur in any imposture, and one so suddenly formed as their's must have been, whatever had been its *object*, cannot be supposed, and much less an object that had nothing in it that mankind in general value in this life; and especially that they should all act in such perfect harmony so long. That not one of them should, though urged by the fear of death, or the hope of reward,

reward, should have made any discovery to the prejudice of their former associates, and that none of their enemies, sagacious and inveterate as many of them were, should have been able to detect their imposture, adds infinitely to the improbability of its being one.

When these new and great views first opened upon the converts to christianity, when they saw their cause to be that of God, by the evidence of the miracles which supported it, and they were themselves occasionally under supernatural influence, this extraordinary fervour, and the effects of it, especially in acts of beneficence to their brethren, was natural. But as first impressions are always the warmest, this zeal would in a course of time as naturally abate, especially as miracles became less frequent, and their intercourse with the world would gradually tend to produce the same attention to the things of this world by which other persons were influenced.

In this situation many of them would require to be reminded of their great views and expectations in another world, by which they had at first been so much impressed, and to be exhorted to the virtues to which they lead. Accordingly, the apostles, seeing

seeing no doubt this unfavonrable influence, and aware of the tendeney and progress of it, do not fail in their epistles to warn them on the subject; and this they do with a distinctness and energy of which we find no example before their time.

And as we at this distance from the time of the first propagation of christianity, who receive all our impressions of it from reading and meditation, and especially as we live in a season of rest from all persecution (a situation which has its disadvantages as well as its advantages) are naturally less under influences of its prineiples, and more exposed to those of the world at large, it may be useful to collect, and particularly attend to, all that the apostles have urged on this most interesting of all subjects; that we may see the firmness of their faith in the great doctrine of a resurrection and a future state, and the influence which they evidently thought it ought to have on men's sentiments and conduct.

It will also be pleasing, as well as useful, to observe the difference which these views made in the state of their own minds. What a wonderful change was produced in them after the death and resurrection of their master, so that they were no longer the same men.

I shall begin with the epistle of Peter, the chief of the apostles, but, who had, no doubt, been as much under the influence of worldly ambition as any of them, as may be suspected from his observing (Mark XVI. 28.) that "they had forsaken all" to follow Jesus, and desiring to know what they should receive as a compensation for the sacrifice, at that time, no doubt, expecting it in this life. What were his views and expectations afterwards, and to the close of a long life, we shall now see. At the same time we cannot fail to perceive a peculiar dignity and energy in the language of this apostle, worthy of the chief of them. The faith of Paul was equally strong, and led him to act with the same disinterestedness and courage, and it is probable that he went through more labour, and in the course of his preaching suffered more; but his language on the same subject has not quite the same dignity, and force.

With what confidence and exultation does this apostle speak of the sure hope of christians in another world, and how justly, and forcibly, does he urge it as a motive to bear with patience and cheerfulness all the persecutions to which they were exposed, in the following passages of his epistles.

"Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Je-

"sus

" sus Christ, who, according to his abundant mer-
" cy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the
" resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an
" inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that
" fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, for you who
" are kept by the power of God through faith unto
" salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time;
" wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now, for a
" season, ye be in heaviness through manifold
" temptations; that the trial of your faith (being
" much more precious than of gold which perish-
" es) may be found unto praise, and honour, and
" glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ; whom
" having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye
" see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy un-
" speakable and full of glory, receiving the end of
" your faith, even the salvation of your souls,"
1 Pet. I. 3. &c.

" Beloved, think it not strange concerning the
" fiery trial which is to try you, as if some strange
" thing happened unto you, but rejoice, in as much
" as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that
" when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad
" with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for
" the name of Christ happy are ye, for the spirit of
" Glory and of God resteth upon you. On their

part

" part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is " glorified."

" If any man suffer as a christian let him not be " ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. " Wherefore let him that suffers according to the " will of God commit the keeping of his soul unto " him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator." 1 Pet. IV. 12. &c.

" Give diligence to make your calling and elec- "tion sure. For if ye do these things ye shall ne- " ver fail; for so an entrance shall be administered " to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom " of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. I. 10.

" The God of all grace, who has called us to his " eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffer- " ed a while, make you perfect, stablish, strength- " en, settle you." 1 Pet. V. 10.

" When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye " shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not a- " way." 1 Pet. V. 4.

" Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be " sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to " be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus " Christ." 1 Pet. I. 13.

Well then might he say, "If ye suffer for righte-
"ousness sake happy are ye. Be not afraid of their
"terror, neither be troubled." 1 Pet. III. 14.

With what noble magnanimity does this apostle contemplate the dissolution of the present state of things, and the commencement of the glorious one that is to follow it, adopting the language of the antient prophets in describing great revolutions in the world.

"Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved,
"what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy
"conversation and godliness; looking for, and
"hasting unto, the coming of the day of God,
"wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dis-
"solved, and the elements melt with fervent heat.
"Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look
"for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwel-
"leth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing
"ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may
"be found of him without spot and blameless." 2
"Pet. III. 11. &c.

The consideration of the *time* when this great and happy event is to take place gave him no concern, since he depended upon the *certainty* of it; and when we are dead the time of the resurrection will

be

be a matter of perfect indifference to all of us. For whatever be the time of our death, that of the resurrection will appear to us to be contiguous to it. And the reason for the seeming delay, and of the uncertainty with respect to the time of the resurrection and future judgment, are very rationally and satisfactorily given by him, on the principle of this being a state of trial and discipline, in which it behoves us to be in continual expectation and preparation for an event so infinitely momentous.

" There will come in the last days scoffers, walk-
" ing after their own lusts, and saying Where is the
" promise of his coming; for since the fathers fell
" asleep all things continue as they were from the
" beginning of the creation. But, beloved, be not
" ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the
" Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years
" as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning
" his promise, but is long suffering to us ward, not
" willing that any should perish, but that all should
" come to repentance." 2 Pet. III. 3. &c.

Such is the animating and consoling language of this great apostle, addressed to his fellow christians, then in a state of persecution, which left them no prospect of peace or comfort in this life. And,

surely, it must have been effectual to answer its purpose. The writings of this apostle are such as we may quote as *authority* for the truth of this great doctrine of, another life, as he received it from Jesus, and it was confirmed by miracles wrought by himself, as well as by his brother apostles, who were endued with the same powers of which they had been witnesses in their common master.

The apostle John was one of the two brothers the sons of Zebedee, whose eager ambition led them openly to solicit the most distinguished honours in the kingdom of their master, though at the evident risk of giving the greatest offence to the rest of the twelve, all whose pretensions must have been nearly as good as theirs. But how changed do we find him at the time of writing his epistles. Here we are far from perceiving any marks of worldly ambition. On the contrary, no man could appear to be more weaned from any attachment to this world, or more desirous to wean others from it. "Love "not the world," says this heavenly-minded apostle, "nor the things that are in the world. If any "man love the world, the love of the father is not in "him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the "flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,

"is

" is not of the Father, but is of the world; and the
" world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he
" that doth the will of God abideth for ever."
1 John II. 15. &c.

Such is the change that new views and principles can make in men. It is not now any thing in this life, which is so uncertain, but that *eternal life*, promised by Jesus, that is the object of his pursuit; and this he thus earnestly recommends to others. " This," says he, 1 John II. 25, " is the promise
" which he has promised us, even eternal life. This
" is the record that God has given us; eternal
" life and this life is in his son. These things I
" have written unto you that ye may believe on
" the name of the son of God, and that ye may
" know that ye have eternal life." 1 John VI. 1, &c.

With what joyful expectation does he now look forward to the return of his master in his glory and kingdom. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God,
" and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but
" we know that when he shall appear we shall be
" like him, for we shall see him as he is, III. 2. And
" we, little children, abide in him, that when he
" shall appear we may have confidence, and not be
" ashamed before him at his coming," II. 28.

In the book of Revelation, interpreting this glory, he says Ch. I. 7. "Behold he cometh in the "clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also "who pierced him, and all the kindreds of the "earth, shall wail because of him;" meaning, no doubt, his enemies, and by no means his friends, to whom it will be a season of the greatest joy and triumph. There, as Jesus said before, John XVI. 22, "their sorrow will be turned into joy. Now "ye are in sorrow, but I will see you again, and "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man "taketh from you." Then the glory which his father gave to him he will give to them, XVII. 22.

James, the other ambitious brother, was the first of the apostles who died a martyr to christianity, being beheaded by Herod Agrippa, fourteen years after the death of Christ; so that there cannot be a doubt but that he had abandoned all views to advancement in this world, as well as the rest of the apostles. Though this James died the first of all the apostles, his brother John long survived them all. For he lived some time after his banishment to the isle of Patmos in the reign of Domitian, which was probably in A. D. 94. From the fate of James the rest of the apostles might see what they had to expect

expect in this life; and yet it is evident that it did not operate as a discouragement to them. They all perished in the same persecuted cause, and most of them probably with no better treatment than he met with.

The other apostles of whom we have any writing left, viz. James and Jude, the former called *the brother of Jesus*, being either his natural brother of the same parents, or some near relation, breathes the same exalted spirit with Peter and John, earnestly exhorting his brethren to bear with patience and fortitude all the sufferings of this life, in the joyful expectation of receiving an abundant recompence in another.

"My brethren," he says, Ch. V. 7. "count it "all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, or ra- "ther trials," and again (I. 2.) "Blessed is the "man that endureth temptation, for when he is tri- "ed he shall receive the crown of life which the "Lord has promised to them that love him. V. "12. Be patient brethren unto the coming of the "Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the "precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience "for it, until he receive the early and latter rains. "Be ye also patient, establish your hearts; for the "coming of the Lord draweth nigh," V. 7.

Jude, to the same purpose, says, v 21. "Keep "yourselves in the love of God, looking for the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal "glory;" and he concludes his short epistle in the following animating manner. "Now to him who "is able to keep you from falling, and to present "you faultless before the presence of his glory, "with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our sa-"viour be glory and majesty, dominion, and pow-"er, both now and forever."

Except Matthew, the author of the Gospel which bears his name, no other of the twelve apostles were writers. They were not ambitious, nor indeed were those whose writings we have at all ambitious, to be known to the world, and to be celebrated, as such. They only wrote what their circumstances, and those of their disciples, required; being content to wait for every honourable distinction till the return of their common master. We cannot, however, doubt but that their disciples, being, wherever they were, in the same circumstances with those to whom the epistles of the other apostles were addressed, they exhorted them on the same principles, referring them to that great day when the wicked will receive a due punishment, and the righteous

righteous an ample reward, and teaching them, as the other apostles did, not to place their affections on any thing in this world, or to be disturbed at any sufferings to which they should be exposed here; since they could only be for a time, and would bear no sensible proportion to the advantage they would derive from bearing them as became christians, that is with patience, fortitude, and with meekness, and without any ill will to their persecutors; and at the same time contributing every thing in their power to lessen the sufferings of their brethren.

How different is this disposition from that which is admired by the world at large, but how superior is it in the eye of reason, as it implies a greater command of temper, less governed by things present, and arising from a more extensive and enlarged view of things, the only proper evidence of our advance in intellectual above sensual life.

With this we, as well as all other animals, necessarily begin our career of existence, and the brutes never in general get much beyond it; but experience and observation lead *men* to extend their views, to reflect upon the past, and look forward to the future; and in this progress we pass from selfishness

to benevolence, and from the contemplation of nature to the veneration and love of the great author of nature, both in doing and suffering, without any regard to what may be the consequence in this life, assured that by such sentiments, and such conduct, we shall not finally be any losers; but that when we shall have done the will of God, and have seen his goodness here below, an abundant entrance will in due time be administered to us in his everlasting kingdom and glory.

ON

ON

THE CHANGE WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES AFTER THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

[PART II.]

And when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

ACTS IV. 13.

IN the preceding discourse we considered the very remarkable change in the views and character of the twelve original apostles in general, and especially of those whose epistles furnish the proper evidence of it, viz. those of Peter, James, John, and Jude. We have seen that from being men of worldly ambition, expecting honours and rewards under the Messiah in this world, they suddenly abandoned every prospect of the kind looking to nothing but a reward in heaven; and that in the firm belief and expectation of *this*, they bore themselves,

selves, and exhorted others to bear, all the sufferings to which for the profession of christianity they could be exposed.

The clearness and energy with which they express themselves on this subject is most interesting and animating, and deserves as much attention in our days of *peace* as in theirs of *persecution*. For if their situation required motives to patience and fortitude, ours requires constant admonition, lest the cares of this world should wholly exclude, as they naturally tend to do, all consideration of another. I shall, therefore, proceed to give as particular an account of the sentiments and exhortations of the apostle Paul on this subject as I did of those of the other apostles.

The change in the conduct, though not perhaps in the character, of Paul was as great, and as sudden, as that in the other apostles. Since from being a most violent persecutor of christianity, he not only became a christian himself, but a most active and successful propagator of christianity, especially in countries distant from Judea; and he seems to have gone through more hardships, and to have suffered more persecution of various kinds, on that account, during the course of a long life, than any other

other of the apostles; and at last, according to ecclesiastical history, he suffered martyrdom at Rome.

Of the worldly ambition of Paul we have no other evidence than the indirect one, which arises from his entering into the views of the leading men of his nation, and being the most active instrument they could employ; from which he would, no doubt, expect such rewards as men in power usually bestow; though at the same time his chief motive might be a genuine zeal for his religion, of the divine authority of which he entertained no doubt, and to which he thought the principles of christianity were hostile. He therefore believed it to be a duty which he owed to God and his religion, as well as to his earthly superiors, to do every thing in his power to suppress it. In other respects his general moral character was as unimpeachable as that of the other apostles. They were alike men of piety, integrity, and sobriety, though misled by the prejudices of their countrymen, who all expected a temporal prince in their Messiah, and therefore looked for such honours and emoluments as temporal princes have it in their power to bestow.

Thinking, as I have observed, that we in this age

age stand in as much need of admonition and exhortation concerning our interest in a future world as the primitive christians, I shall lay before you what the apostle Paul advanced on this subject, and we shall see it to be no less explicit and animating, and furnishing more information with respect to it than we find in the writings of the other apostles. In zeal and courage Paul yielded to no man, he derived his knowledge from the same source, viz. from Jesus in person, and his writings tend in an eminent degree to inspire the sentiments which he entertained himself. As the passages in the writings of this apostle relating to a future state are numerous, I shall recite them in the order of time in which they were written, beginning with the epistles to the Thessalonians, which were the first.

In Thessalonica Paul preached but a short time, probably not more than three weeks, Acts XVII. 1. &c. and so ill was he received there by the unbelieving Jews, who represented him and his companions as *men who turned the world upside down*, that he was persuaded to leave the place by night. The shortness of the time, therefore, would not admit of the converts there being fully instructed in all the principles of the new religion; and happily for us they had so far misunderstood what he had taught

taught them concerning the resurrection, that he found it necessary to explain himself further on the subject, in an epistle which he wrote to them as soon as he reached Athens; since by this means we are acquainted with some circumstances concerning it which we could not learn from any other of the books of scripture.

It was a custom with the heathens to make loud lamentations over their dead, which, if they had any value for them while they lived, was natural, as they had no expectation of seeing them any more. This custom Paul thought unbecoming christians, and therefore he says (1 Thess. IV. 13.) "I would "not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning "them that sleep, that we sorrow not as others "who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus "died and rose again, even so they also who sleep "in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we "say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we "who are alive and remain unto the coming of the "Lord shall not prevent" (or rather shall not have any advantage over) "them that are asleep. For "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with "a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the "trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise "first.

" first. Then we who are alive and remain shall " be caught up together with them in the clouds, " to meet the Lord in the air, and ss shall we ever " be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one a- " nother with these words."

This was, indeed, a source of consolation abundantly sufficient for the purpose, and peculiar to them as christians; so that they had no occasion to lament the death of their christian friends as the heathens did theirs, since they might depend upon seeing them again after the resurrection, and in circumstances far more advantageous than any they had known here.

It appearing that these christians at Thessalonica were still under some misapprehension about the doctrine of the resurrection, and especially about the *time* of it, conceiving it to be much nearer than it was, the apostle saw reason to address to them another epistle, not long after writing the first, and to correct the mistake they were under he says (2 Thess. II. 1. &c.) " Now we beseech you, bre- " thren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, " and by our gathering together unto him, that ye " be not soon shaken in mind, nor be troubled, as " that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man de-

" ceive

"ceive you by any means. For that day shall not "come unless there be a falling away first." He then proceeds to point out to them an antichristian power that was to arise in the church before the coming of Christ, from which they might gather that this great event could not be so near as they had imagined.

As this christian church at Thessalonica was soon exposed to much persecution, the apostle encourages the members of it to bear their sufferings with patience and fortitude, from the consideration of the abundant recompence that would be made to them at the coming of Christ, which would be as dreadful to their enemies, as it would be joyful to them.

"We are bound" he says, "to thank God al-"ways for you, brethren, as it is meet, because your "faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of eve-"ry one of you all towards each other aboundeth; "so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches "of God for your patience and faith in all your per-"secutions and tribulations that ye endure: which "is a manifest token of the righteous judgment "of God, that ye may be accounted worthy of the "kingdom of God for which ye also suffer. Seeing

" it is a righteous thing with God to recompence
" tribulation to them that trouble you. And to
" you who are troubled rest with us; when the
" Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with
" his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking ven-
" geance on them that know not God, and that o-
" bey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who
" shall be punished with everlasting destruction
" from the presence of the Lord, and from the glo-
" ry of his power, when he shall come to be glori-
" fied in his saints, and to be admired in all them
" that believe."

With great reason did the apostle exhort these christians (1 Thess. III. 3.) not to be moved by their affliction. "You yourselves," says he, "know
" that we are appointed thereunto. For verily
" when we were with you, we told you before, that
" we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to
" pass, and ye know."

If it was happy for us that the Thessalonian christians mistook the meaning of the apostle with respect to the resurrection, it is more so that those at Corinth perverted it by a false philosophy; because we derive more advantage from the conceit of the latter, than from the ignorance of the former, as it gave

gave occasion to the apostle to explain himself still more fully on the subject in his epistle to them. For in this he leaves little that we could reasonably wish to know concerning it.

The christians at Corinth misled by the principles of the Greek philosophy, were disposed to treat the doctrine of a resurrection with contempt, as a most improbable thing, as it also appeared to the Gnostic christians, and imagined that the apostle in announcing it must have had some other than a literal meaning. They held *matter*, and the *body* which is composed of it, in great contempt, and thought it a happy circumstance for the immaterial soul to be delivered from it by death, so far were they from wishing for a reunion with it at the resurrection. But the apostle, who, with the Jews, expected no future life but in the supposition of a proper resurrection, paid no attention to this Grecian philosophy; and therefore he considered the disbelief of the resurrection to be the same thing with the disbelief of a future state altogether; saying (1 Cor. XV. 17.) "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." For he justly observed that, if there be no general resurrection, there are no particular ones, not even that of Christ, whereas there

was the most direct and abundant evidence of the reality of *his* resurrection, which is the assurance of ours.

On this account he particularly enumerates most of the appearances of Jesus after he was raised from the dead, and especially his appearing to more than five hundred of his disciples at one time, most of whom were then living, and could attest it. But the resurrection of Jesus is a pledge of ours. Consequently, the apostle calls him (v. 20.) *the first fruits of them that sleep;* the great *harvest*, to which he alludes by the mention of the *first fruits*, being the resurrection of all his followers. It has pleased God, he observes, that "as by man came death, "so by man also comes the resurrection of the dead, "and that as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all "be made alive." And as all power is to be put into the hands of Christ, and all his enemies are to be subdued by him, the last of them is death.

After this he proceeds to answer several objections that were made to the doctrine of the resurrection, especially with respect to the kind of body, with which men will rise; and he observes that as every kind of corn that men sow and reap is renewed after being buried in the ground, it will be the same with

with men, but with this advantage,-that our future bodies will not be like the present ones, liable to corruption, disease and death, for that with respect to it they may be called spiritual, like the glorified body of Jesus.

The same advantageous change he observes will take place in those who shall be alive at the coming of Christ. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall "all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of "an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall "sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, "and we shall be changed. For this corruptible "must put on incorruption, and this mortal must "put on immortality." After this, in the language of triumph, he adds, referring to a passage in Isaiah, "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy "victory. Thanks be to God who gives us the "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

On this glorious doctrine he immediately grounds this natural exhortation. "Therefore my "beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, "always, abounding in the work of the Lord, for- "asmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be "in vain in the Lord." Indeed there cannot be any more powerful motive to the diligent practice

of our duty, and a steady perseverance in it.

This was the great encouragement and support to Paul himself under all the trials that he underwent in the propagation of the gospel, as we see in this epistle. "If" he says, v. 32, "after the manner "of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, "what advantage have we if the dead rise not. Let "us eat and drink for to-morrow we die."

In his second epistle he has recourse to the same animating prospect as that which supported him under all his tribulations. "2 Cor. IV. 8. We are "troubled on every side" he says "but not distres- "sed. We are perplexed, but not in despair; per- "secuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not de- "stroyed; always bearing about in the body the dy- "ing of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus "might be manifested in our body. For we who live "are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest "in our mortal flesh." ib. 16. "For this "cause we faint not; for though our outer man "perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by "day. For our light affliction, which is but for a "moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding "and eternal weight of glory; while we look not

"at

"at the things which are seen, but at the things "which are not seen. For the things which are seen "are temporal; but the things which are not seen "are eternal." "For we know that if our earthly "house of this our tabernacle be dissolved, "we have a building of God, a house not "made with hands, eternal in the heavens." V. 1. &c.

There is a peculiar energy in all the epistles that Paul wrote from Rome, where he was two years a prisoner, expecting his condemnation or acquittal at the tribunal of the emperor, to whom he had appealed from his perjudiced judges in Judea. Then too he was far advanced in life, and sensible that his continuance in it could not be long. In these circumstances his epistles are like the dying advices of an affectionate parent, urging upon his children such considerations as he then felt would be of the most importance to them. And a view to a future state of rest and reward would naturally be uppermost in the mind of one who had laboured and suffered so much as he had done in the cause of christianity. Accordingly, we find that a view of this was constantly upon his mind, and that he was upon every occasion directing the views of his fellow christians to it.

In the christians at Philippi Paul had found his most generous friends, who, it appears, had been more particularly attentive to him than those in other places. The Philippians, as well as himself, had been exposed to peculiar hardships from their first reception of the gospel. But how light did he make of all his sufferings, thereby intimating that they ought to make as little account of theirs in the same cause, when he says, Phil. III. 8. "Yea "doubtless and I count all things but loss for the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my "Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all "things, and count them but dung that I may win "Christ, that I may know him, and the power of his "resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, "being made conformable unto his death; if by "any means I may attain to the resurrection of the "dead" (Phil. III. 8. &c.) "Our conversation is in "heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, "the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile "body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glo-"rified body, according to the working whereby he "is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. III. 20. &c.

We have no account of Paul ever preaching at Colos-

Colosse, but by some means or other the gospel had been preached and received there, as indeed it soon was in all the cities of Asia Minor. To these christians the apostle now writes from Rome, and in his epistle he does not neglect to remind them of their great interest in a future state, as a recompence for all their good deeds and sufferings in this. "We give thanks to God and the Father of our "Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since "we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the "love which you have for all saints; for the hope "that is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye have "heard before in the word of the truth of the gos-"pel." Col. I. 3. &c.

Timothy was a favourite disciple and fellow labourer with this apostle, who, after travelling with him, as an assistant and an evangelist, resided at Ephesus, a city of the greatest note in Asia Minor, and the metropolis of Asia proper. This, therefore, was a station of peculiar importance; and accordingly the apostle, in the epistle which he wrote to him from Rome, which is the second (for the first epistle to him was written long before when Paul was at Corinth) takes great pains to encourage and animate him, urging more especially the

considera-

In the [illegible] at Philippi Paul had found his most generous friends, who, it appears, had been, more particularly attentive to him than those in other places. The Philippians, as well as himself, had been exposed to peculiar hardships from their first reception of the gospel. But how light did he make of all his sufferings, thereby intimating that they [illegible] to make as little account of theirs in the same [illegible] when he says, Phil. III. 8. "Yea [illegible] and I count all things but loss for the [illegible] of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my [illegible] whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung that I may win [illegible] that I may know him, and the power of his [illegible] and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by [illegible] means I may attain to the resurrection of the [illegible]" (Phil. III. 8. &c.) "Our conversation is in [illegible], from whence also we look for a Saviour [illegible] Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change ou[illegible] [illegible], that it may be fashioned like unto [illegible] body, according to th[illegible] [illegible] even to subd[illegible] [illegible] III. 20. &c.

We have no [illegible]

which would entitle him to a glorious recompence "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of "my departure is at hand. I have fought the good "fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the "faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown "of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous "judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me "only, but to all them that love his appearing." 2 Tim. IV. 6.

From these weighty considerations he gives Timothy the most solemn charge to attend to his duty as an evangelist, with a view to this great reward. "I charge thee before God (IV. 1.) and the Lord "Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the "dead at his appearing and his kingdom. Preach "the word, be instant in season and out of season, "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering "and doctrine."

Titus was another disciple and fellow labourer with Paul, and was by him stationed in the isle of Crete. Here likewise he earnestly exhorts to diligence, reminding him, as he had done Timothy, of the hope of eternal life, which he says, I. 2. "God, who "cannot lie, has promised before the world began." "The grace of God, has appeared unto all men, "teaching

" teaching us that denying ungodliness and world-
" ly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and
" godly in this present world; looking for that bles-
" sed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great
" God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave
" himself for us that he might redeem us from all
" iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people,
" zealous of good works." II. 11. &c.

The Jewish or Hebrew christians were from the first exposed to grievous persecution from their bigotted countrymen, and a great proportion of them appear to have been in low and distressed circumstances, so as to stand in need of the benefaction of the more wealthy Gentile converts. To these the apostle holds out the most comfortable prospects in futurity. " Here," he says, (Heb. XIII, 14.) " we have no continuing city, but we seek one
" to come." And again, XII. 28. " Wherefore
" we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,
" let us have grace, whereby we may serve God ac-
" ceptably, with reverence and godly fear."

We see in the language of the apostles, and in their sentiments and conduct, which corresponded with it, the infinite advantage that christians, and even unlearned christians had over the most enlightened

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of the heathens, with respect to the troubles of life and the fear of death, in consequence of the firm belief of the former in the great doctrine of a future state, which was not only to be the termination of all their sufferings, but, under the righteous moral government of God, a certain means of obtaining an abundant recompence for all their sufferings in the cause of virtue here, whereas the heathens had little knowledge of any moral government of God, or of a providence here, and no knowledge at all that could be of any practical use of a future state. To them all beyond the grave was absolute darkness, but to christians it is the most resplendent light.

The christian sees the hand of God, of his God and father, in every thing that befalls him here; and he expects a greater display of his perfections, and more evident and uninterrupted marks of his favour hereafter. These views enable him to consider all the troubles of life as a part of that excellent and benevolent discipline which is to prepare him for future happiness, a discipline which he is taught to believe is as necessary to him, as the controul and discipline of a child is to his acquiring the proper sentiments and conduct of a man; qualifying him

to

to be happy in himself, and disposed to make others so; which without this controul and discipline in the time of childhood and youth, it was impossible that he should be. And the near approach of death, which at the best cannot but afford a gloomy prospect to a heathen and an unbeliever, is consequently regarded by him not as an object of alarm, or despondence, but a source of joy and triumph; so that when he leaves the the world, which he believes to be at the call and appointment of him that made him, and sent him into it, he can with the apostle sing the triumphant song, O death where is thy sting "O grave where is thy victory." Thanks be to God who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The difference between the moral writings of the heathens, and those of the apostles, to the advantage of the latter, cannot but appear upon the slightest attention. As these, besides being superior in point of clearness, have, from the fulness of their persuasion on the subject, which the heathens had not, infinitely more of animation; so that the perusal of their writings cannot fail to excite the same sentiments in others.

As I have purposely confined myself to the subject

ject of courage and perseverance, in bearing sufferings of every kind, and even persecution unto death, from the prospect of a future glorious reward which was wholly unknown to the heathens, I shall now recite a few passages from the epistles of Paul, in which mention is made of the sufferings to which he was exposed, and of his magnanimity in bearing them, without any immediate view to a future reward, though no doubt it was constantly on his mind.

At Corinth the christians seem to have been so numerous, and respectable, in the time of the apostle, or their fellow citizens so much more civilized than those of many other places, that they were less exposed to persecution than the christians in other places; and they had among them some eloquent declaimers, who seem to have derived pecuniary emolument from their harangues. The apostle, therefore, represents their situation as enviable with respect to that of other churches, and on this account he seems to have chosen to describe his own situation by way of contrast with theirs. "Now," says he, (1 Cor. 4, 8,) ye are "rich. Ye have reigned as kings without us, "and I would to God that ye did reign, that we

"also

"also might reign with you." And he immediately adds the following affecting account of his own situation.

"I think that God has set forth us the apostles "last, as it were appointed to death; for we are "made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, "and to men.—Even to this hour we both hun- "ger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffetted, "and have no certain dwelling place, and labour, "working with our own hands. Being reviled, "we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being "defamed, we intreat. We are made as the filth "of the earth and are the offscourings of all "things unto this day." 1 Cor. IV. 9. &c.

This was in his first epistle to this church. In the second, which was written not long after it, he still reminds them of his sufferings, to which it is probable they had not been sufficiently attentive. "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of "our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we "were pressed out of measure, above strength, "so that we despaired even of life. But we had "the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should "not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the "dead; who delivered us from so great a death;

"and

" and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will " yet deliver us." 2 Cor. I. 8. &c.

" In all things approving ourselves the min- " isters of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in " necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprison- " ments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in " fastings —— by honour and dishonour, by evil " report and good report: as deceivers, and yet " true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying " and behold we live; as chastened and not killed; " as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet " making many rich; as having nothing and yet " possessing all things." 2 Cor. VI. 4. &c. As a contrast of his situation with that of the eloquent speakers in this church of Corinth, who seem to have been much at their ease, he gives the following affecting account of his labours and sufferings. 2 Cor. XI. 23. &c. " Are they ministers of " Christ, I am more. In labours more abundant, " in stripes above measure, in prisons more fre- " quent, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times " received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I " beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suf- " fered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in " the deep. In journeying often, in perils of wa- " ters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own

" countrymen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils " in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In " weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in " hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and " nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of " all the churches. Who is weak and I am not " weak? who is offended and I burn not? If I must " needs glory, I will glory of the things which con- " cern my infirmities. The God and Father of " our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever- " more knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus " the governor under Aretas the king kept the ci- " ty of the Damascanes with a garrison, desirous to " apprehend me; and through a window, in a bas- " ket, I was let down by the wall, and escaped his " hands."

In his epistle from Rome, written in the near prospect of death, after enduring, as we have seen, such a series of hardship as few men have ever gone through, he thought proper to remind the churches to which he wrote of what he had suffered, that they might not be surprised, or discouraged, if they met with no better treatment in this world than he had met with.

To the Ephesians he says, Ch. III. 13. "Where-

fore

"fore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulation "for you, which is your glory;" intimating that so far from being discouraged, or ashamed, they ought to be proud of these proofs of his affection for them, and of his zeal in the common cause.

To the Colossians he says, to the same purpose, Ch. I. 24. "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, "and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions "of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which "is the church." As if a certain portion of suffering had been necessary to establish christianity and as if that of Christ had not been sufficient, he took the remainder upon himself. The same idea occurs, though not so distinctly, in his epistle to the Galatians, written long before this. Gal. II. 20. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Where-"fore let no man trouble me; for I bear in my "body the marks of the Lord Jesus." VI. 17.

The christians at Philippi had suffered much. Writing to them from Rome, he expresses the greatest indifference and contempt of all that could befal him. "In nothing," he says. (Ch. I. 20.) "shall I be ashamed, but that with all boldness, "as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified "in my body, whether it be by life or by death.

"I have learned," he says, (IV. 11.) "in what-
"ever state I am, therewith to be content. I know
"both how to be abased, and how to abound. E-
"very where, and in all things, I am instructed
"both to be full and to be hungry, both to a-
"bound and to suffer need. I can do all things
"through Christ who strengthens me."

The general sentiment of the duty of patience and fortitude under the evils of life may, no doubt, be found in the writing of Marcus Antoninus, Seneca, and other heathens; but the feelings they convey are very different, quite feeble and inefficacious. The heathens could not have the same *motives* to patience and fortitude. Those of christians are infinitely more efficacious, and far more *natural*, as they are taught to look beyond them to objects which in similar cases do not fail to enable men to bear hardships of any kind, viz. to a certain advantage accruing from them, and to which they are necessary. If the christian suffer here, especially in the cause of virtue and truth, he is taught to expect a certain recompence in a future state. Compared with this, the patience and fortitude of heathens, especially in the near view of death, cannot be much more than mere obstinacy, arising from the consideration of the necessity of

bearing

bearing what they cannot avoid; and therefore of the folly of complaining where it cannot answer any good end.

Let the writings of the Stoics on this subject be compared with those of the apostles, and the difference must be striking. In the sufferings of christians we see there is a source of joy. Paul speaks of *rejoicing in tribulation*, but for this the Stoic could not have any motive. The apostles did not deny that painful sufferings were evils. They acknowledge that they were not in themselves *joyous but grievous*, but they *worked out for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory*. According to the apostles, it is only *for a time*, and *if need be, that we are to be in sorrow through divers trials*, and to the end of this time they were well able to look, and, like their master, for *the joy that was set before them*, they endured every affliction, and even the pains of death itself.

Let us now hear Marcus Antoninus on the subject of the fear of death, to which he frequently adverts in his *Meditations*, and from which we may infer that it was much upon his mind. After enumerating the duties of life, which he says "every "man is under obligation to discharge," he says,

(II. 17.) " he must expect death with a benevo-
" lent and calm mind, as a dissolution of those
" elements of which every animal consists. And
" if nothing uncommon happen to these elements,
" and they be only changed as all elements conti-
" nually are, into others, why should we dread
" the event, or be disturbed at that change and dis-
" solution which is the lot of all. For it is ac-
" cording to nature, and nothing that is natural is
" an evil."

How poor is the consolation which this language holds out compared with that of the apostles, which have now been recited. His reasoning about the indifference with which we should regard the duration of life is as unsatisfactory; and indeed manifestly absurd, if life be of any value. " If any
" of the gods," he says, (IV. 47.) " should tell
" you that you should die either to-morrow, or
" the day following, you would not be disturbed
" at it; unless you were of a very cowardly and
" abject disposition. The difference between to-
" morrow and the day following is indeed a trifle;
" but for the same reason you should not make any
" account of the difference if it should be either to-
" morrow, or a thousand years hence." I doubt not,

not, however, but that if the emperor himself had the choice of dying either after one more day of life, or of living, I do not say, a thousand years, but to the usual time of human life, he would not have hesitated to show, by his actual choice of the latter, that he thought it was not a matter of so much indifference as in his writings he represents it.

How thankful, then, should we be for the gospel, which gives us such an unspeakable advantage over the most enlightened of the heathens with respect to what must interest all men the most, the troubles of life, and the fear of death. Under these the heathens could at the best only *acquiesce*, as in things that were unavoidable; and being, as Antoninus says, *agreeable to nature*, must be the best with respect to the whole systems; but not for them in particular. They had nothing to look to beyond the business and the troubles of this life, and no hope at all after death. And their arguments for patiently acquiescing under the evils of life, and in the view of death, would never have any weight with the bulk of mankind, and whatever they might pretend, could only be affected by the philosophers themselves. Whatever they might teach, or write, they must have *felt* like other

men in the same circumstances, having no more expectation of surviving death, or ever seeing any better state of things, than other men.

Being then through the goodness of God possessed of this superior knowledge, this *treasure* so long hidden from the greatest part of the world, this *pearl of great price*, let us value it in proportion to its real worth, converting this *knowledge* into useful *feelings* and *practice*, by living agreeably to the light with which we are favoured. Otherwise, it would have been better for us to have continued ignorant heathens, as we should then have had less to answer for; and woe will be to those who when this *light is come into the world* shew by their conduct that *they love darkness better than light because their deeds are evil.* To our christian knowledge, let us, with the apostle, add all the proper virtues of the christian life. These exceeding great and precious promises are given to us, that, as the apostle Peter says, *we may thereby become partakers of a divine nature*, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world. *Giving all diligence*, as he exhorts, *let us add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness universal*

universal charity. If these things as he says, *be in us and abound, we shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let us then, my christian brethren, *give diligence to make our calling and election sure, for*, as the same apostle adds, *if we do these things we shall never fail; for so on entrance will be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

ON THE

NECESSITY OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

What do ye more than others?

MATT. V. 27.

THE discourse of our Lord of which these words make a part was addressed to his first followers, and especially those who were afterwards *Apostles*, and preachers of the gospel. In it he explains what was their proper character, their station, and their duty; setting them in as striking a light as possible. *Ye*, says he, *are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city set upon a hill.* They were to be the public instructors of mankind, embassadors as it were from God, sent by him for the great purpose of persuading a sinful world to abandon their vices, and sinful customs, and to devote themselves to a life of virtue, with a view to a happy immortality.

Of

Of such persons it was justly expected that they should be examples to others, that their lives might illustrate their doctrine. As they were supposed to *know*, and *pretend* to more than others, so it would be reasonably expected that they should *do* more than others; and in what respects our Lord's disciples should chiefly endeavour to outdo others, he particularly informs them; and the instances that he mentions are indeed most worthy of our ambition. Thus to strive who shall carry the generous virtues of benevolence, forgiveness of injuries, and the desire to live useful lives, to the greatest height.

You have heard, says he, *that it has been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.* And as an incentive to a virtue so seemingly above humanity, he annexes this noble motive, *that ye may be the children of your father who is in heaven, who causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and maketh his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust.* Pursuing the same argument, he adds, *for if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye; do not even the publicans the same?*

same; and if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others, do not even the publicans so?

Lastly, by way of conclusion, he repeats the motive above mentioned, that it might make the deeper impression upon the minds of his hearers, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.* To act in this manner with such true greatness of mind, and disinterested benevolence, is to act the part that the almighty and infinitely benevolent maker of all things continually acts, it is to be as the *sons of God*, doing the work of our heavenly father. Could a nobler principle or a nobler cause of action be proposed to mankind or could they be enforced by a more powerful and worthy motive. To be governed by these principles, and to act in this manner is to approach as near to the sentiments and conduct of Divinity, as is permitted to mortals.

The words of my text, you may observe, stand in a particular connexion: Our Lord is in this place enforceing a general undistinguishing regard to all persons, whatever be their characters or offices. It is as if he had said, "if you are only "concerned for the welfare of your *friends*, per-"sons of the same family, nation, religion, and "party

"party with yourselves, those whom you usually "call *brethren*, where is your peculiar excellence? "This is no more than may be expected, and "what is generally found, in the narrowest minds. "It is what even the Publicans, men of whose prin- "ciples and virtue you entertain the lowest opini- "on, are not deficient in." Such is the meaning of the words as they stand in my text; but in discoursing from them I shall take a larger field, and shall consider,

I. The superior obligation to a holy life incumbent on all well instructed christians, such as professedly meet for the purpose of public worship in this place; and

II. I shall more particularly address myself to certain descriptions of persons, such as have enjoyed advantages not possessed by others, on which account still more is expected from them.

Let it, however, be observed, that though I shall speak of some persons as under greater obligations than others to a virtuous life and conversation, I do not suppose that *any* are wholly excusable if they neglect their duty, though they be not so culpable as others who have more to answer for. No, my Brethren, to have the gift of *reason* only, to be formed capable of knowing any thing, though

though but obscurely, concerning the nature, perfections, and providence of God, is sufficient to lay us under indispensible obligations to serve him. To have a principle of conscience distinguishing right from wrong, applauding us for the one, and condemning us for the other, is to have a proper *law within us*, and to which we are obliged by the frame of our natures to yield obedience. If men have nothing more than the use of their reason and conscience, though in other respects they should lie under every possible disadvantage, it is justly expected of them, the great being who gave them those powers expects it of them, that they should live as becomes rational and accountable creatures, as sensible that they are under a law to themselves, and to their maker, from whom they may perceive that they have some reason to expect to receive a recompence according to their works, though they cannot tell *when, or where, or how*. In this situation is the whole race of mankind, if they have the use of their reason only. We all owe obedience to our maker, and are liable to be punished if we be not careful to pay it.

From this lowest step of duty and obligation, let us now observe how the scale of duty and obligation, and consequently of a capacity for happiness, rises.

rises. Are all who have the use of their reason, and the possession of their senses, under obligation to glorify and serve God their maker, much more are all those who to their natural reason have superadded to them the superior light of any revelation, though ever so obscure and imperfect. Is the untutored heathen under obligation to behave with justice and integrity towards men, and with reverence towards the supreme being, of whom he knows so little, much more is the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian. None of these are left to the mere light of nature to teach them a knowledge of God and of their duty. They are all instructed from above, concerning the perfections and providence of God, concerning their duty here, and their expectations hereafter. All these expect a righteous judgment to come. They are also informed, and believe, that the God who will be their judge at last intimately inspects their conduct now, is a witness to the secrets of their hearts, and will consign them to future happiness or misery, and the proper portions of these, according to their character and conduct in life. These general practical truths Jews, Mahometans, and Christians, are all acquainted with; and therefore the least enlightened of these are justly expected to walk

walk better than the Gentiles walk, to do more for God, and mankind, than they.

But my Brethren, are we not only rational beings, and enjoy the benefit of revelation in general, but is the revelation that we enjoy the last, and and most perfect that God has made to man? are we christians? then is our obligation to walk worthy of so *high and so holy a calling* unspeakably strong. Yea, well may we say with the apostle, *which way shall we think to come off, or escape, if we be found to neglect so great salvation.* Have we the will of God most clearly revealed to us, without the least cloud or obscurity, by persons commissioned from God for that very purpose, who wrought the most stupendous miracles in proof of their divine mission? More especially, have we the instructions of Jesus Christ, who brought life and immortality to light? who was sent for the express purpose of teaching with the greatest clearness and authority, and likewise of exemplifying in his own person, that most important of all doctrines, a resurrection to immortal life; dying in the most public manner, and rising from the dead in such circumstances as that no historical fact was ever more strongly attested; were his disciples particularly commissioned to teach this religion to all nations (since God the

the father of all is no respecter of persons) and have we fewer rites and ceremonies to attend to in our worship of this one true and living God, whom as being *a spirit* we are taught to worship in spirit and truth? In all these important respects have we so much the advantage of Jews, and does not God and the world expect from us a more pure and rational worship, a more disinterested and unconfined benevolence, and a greater weanedness from the world, in consequence of having our views more directly pointed to another; so that we can only consider ourselves *as strangers and pilgrims here below.*

The religion of Christ lays us under obligation to live as he did, to resemble him in the temper of our minds, and the course of our conduct, which is as the apostle says, *not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, by the renewing of our minds, setting our affections on things above, where Christ now is at the right hand of God. Ye are my friends* says our master, *if ye do whatsoever I command you.* To obey his commands, and to copy after his example, is to *confess him before men*, and such only as confess him in this manner, will he confess, and acknowledge to be his, before his

heavenly father, and the holy angels, at the last day.

The virtue and the piety we observe in many Jews, and even Mahometans, ought to shame us who are christians. They have not near so many advantages as we are possessed of, and yet, with all their disadvantages, many of them, I fear, will rise up to our shame and confusion of face at the last day, when they will be justified, and we condemned. Let their firm faith, and indefatigable zeal, excite our emulation. What in them is imperfect, let us supply; what in them is good, let us exceed; and let it not be said that the devotion or benevolence of any disciple of Jesus, fell short of that of a scholar of Moses, or of Mahomet.

Lastly, is the christianity that we profess of the purest kind; are we protestants, is our worship free from those superstitious ceremonies with which the church of Rome has unnaturally loaded it, and many of which still remain in the partially reformed church of England? Are we taught not to lay that undue stress upon external acts, such as baptism, confirmation, and absolution, which their established faith either positively enjoins, or gives too much encouragement to do?

Are

Are we trained up in the sound belief that nothing but a good heart and an exemplary life are pleasing to Almighty God, and will recommend us to his favour and acceptance? Is this our faith? permit me to say, that so pure and spiritual a *profession* lays us under obligations to live lives in the highest degree pure and spiritual, worthy of a pure and undefiled religion.

The end of all *knowledge* is *practice*, and it would ill become us to shew the zeal that we do by forming ourselves into separate societies, and being at the expence of supporting them, by which we hold out to the world our idea of their importance, if we thought they were merely matters of speculation, and had no connection with moral duty. If we contend for such great doctrines as those of the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, against those who infringe upon them, by teaching that there are three persons intitled to the same rank of *God*, equally objects of religious worship; If we believe that the favour of Almighty God is not purchased by the sufferings or merits of another for us, and that, independently of a regard to their future character, no particular individual of our race is predestinated to enjoy his favour to the exclusion of others, we see in the

strongest light the importance of giving this one God our undivided homage, and putting our intire confidence in him.

If we hold that men do not become the children of God in consequence of any miraculous *new birth*, depending on nothing but the arbitrary will of God, which he may impart at any time, even at the last moment of life, but are sensible that a character acceptable to God is formed as other parts of a character are formed, by early habits, and continued practice, which necessarily require *time*, we certainly see in a stronger light than others do the great importance of *personal holiness*, and the necessity of *personal exertion*, and therefore it may be the more expected from us that we *be up, and doing, working out our Salvation with fear and trembling*, knowing that with the ordinary favour of divine providence, our success with respect to the blessings of another life depends upon ourselves, just as much as the provision that we make for the things of this life. We equally owe all both to God, and to ourselves, at the same time.

Let our lives, my brethren, be as pure, as our sentiments, equally worthy of God and of Christ, and we shall be indeed the *light of the world*, the

salt

salt of the earth, and *a city that is set upon a hill.* Others will be won upon by our conversation and *give glory to God our father in heaven.* For such is the natural effect of an example truly great and illustrious, of lives and characters truly pious and benevolent, on such minds and tempers as the world is composed of. For many who are in a degree lost to a sense of virtue in themselves, can yet discern and admire it in others; and every sentiment of *admiration* and *esteem* tends to engage *imitation*; and will have a certain effect, though it's full influence may be prevented by a variety of foreign circumstances.

Let us then my brethren, seriously put the question in my text to ourselves. Do we enjoy the benefit of revelation, are we christians, are we protestants, and as we necessarily flatter ourselves, of the most enlightened kind? *what do we more than others?* In the face of the world we pretend to be and to do something more. Why else do we separate ourselves from the heathen world, from the church of Rome, and from the church of England. The avowed reason why we cannot join in their worship, is because we do not think it to be sufficiently *pure.* It is on account of the corruptions

which we justly say are among them, and which certainly debase the pure doctrine of the gospel. We also think that, besides a regard to *truth* and *right*, which ought always to bind the consciences, and direct the *conduct* of men, we think that the received tenets of other churches do in some measure give encouragement to vice, by laying an undue stress on something else than pure virtue. It is on these accounts, if we be protestants, and dissenters on principle, that we dissent from the church of Rome, and all other civil establishments of religion in the world; and since these are our public professions, must not something extraordinary be expected from us? This will certainly be the case. The expectation is just, and we ought to answer it.

Let us not be ashamed of our good confession. I trust we are bearing a public testimony in favour of the purity of the worship of the one true God, amidst a corrupt and idolatrous generation. The christianity that we profess we have good reason to believe (and we are at any time able to produce and maintain those reasons) is much more like that pure and holy religion which the apostles preached under that name, than what is held by those from whom we dissent. The cause we are engaged in

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may therefore with propriety be termed *the cause of God and of truth*, a cause we ought never to abandon from any views respecting this world, such as fear, interest, or fashion. But be it our care to walk worthy of so pure a profession, and live as God and the world may reasonably expect that rational christians should live; and then whatever may be said of us by those who are ignorant of our principles and couduct, we shall have the testimony of all reasonable and well informed men, and what is more satisfactory still, that of our own consciences, that *in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.* And as we have joined ourselves to the purest church of Christ on earth, and lived suitably to it, we shall hereafter make part of that truly Catholic church which will be *gathered from all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, complete in Christ it's head;* when we shall join in a still more pure and spiritual worship of God than our imperfect state, our imperfect knowledge, and apprehension of things, will admit of at present, more to the glory of God, and our own satisfaction and improvement.

I reserve the time that remains to speak to a few particular cases, in which the scale of privileges, or moral advantages, rises still higher; so

that more may be expected from those who are possessed of them, than from christians, in general.

In the first place, I will direct my discourse to such who have enjoyed the great privilege of religious education, as have been trained up by their pious parents in the fear of God, and the practice of virtue, from their earliest years. *What*, I ask, *do ye more than others?* What do you more than those who have had the misfortune to be born and educated if it can be called *education*, by wicked parents who were taught to curse and to swear before they could speak plain, who were encouraged in thieving and other arts of dishonesty, as soon as they were capable of practicing any thing, and who learned nothing more early than to make mock of all religion and even sobriety; and many such, to our shame, be it spoken, there are in all countries, and especially in great towns and cities, who are training up to infamy, in this world, and to a state of more dreadful punishment in the next.

On the contrary, your conscientious parents took pains to make you sensible, as soon as you could be made sensible of any thing, of the great duties that you owe to God, and to man, of your proper conduct

conduct in this life, and your expectations in another. You were made acquainted with a heaven and a hell as soon as you could understand any thing at all, or know what the words meant. You were properly corrected if any thing in your behaviour escaped you that was in the least unbecoming religion and good morals; and what is perhaps the greatest advantage of all, you had constantly before your eyes a pattern of goodness, and of every thing praise worthy, in the temper and behaviour of your affectionate parents, who wished to see you happy in this world and in the way of being still more happy, together with themselves, in the world to come.

Like Timothy you were from your childhood brought acquainted with the scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, and had other good books put into your hands, and proper directions for reading them. When you entered into life, after being accustomed to habits of sobriety and industry under the eye, and by the example, of your parents, you had the most earnest and salutary cautions and instructions given you about your behaviour in it. You were particularly warned of the danger of bad insnaring company, and whatever might be hurtful to your morals, or

take off that sense of religion with which they had been careful to impress your, and were taught to associate yourselves with the virtuous and well disposed wherever you came, and such were the companions they chose for you while you were under their more immediate direction.

These, my brethren, are valuable privileges indeed, and many who now hear me have no doubt enjoyed them. Let me then ask you, but do you more especially ask yourselves, *what do ye more than others*? Are you as strictly pious and conscientious, and are your lives as useful and exemplary, as the world may justly expect from these advantages?

If, notwithstanding all this care and pains bestowed upon you, you turn out profligate, and utter strangers to the power of religion; or if you be only careless and thoughtless about your duty and a future state; If, notwithstanding all the care that has been taken of your education, you be as much addicted to sensuality, as worldly minded, and as indifferent about religion, as too many are, you must be hardened and abandoned indeed, such as nothing can work upon; and to whom those awful words of scripture will be applicable.

plicable. *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it and bringeth forth fruit, meet for them by whom it is dressed receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.*

You, therefore, who have had the benefit of a virtuous and pious education, disappoint not the just expectations of your friends and of the world. Be your parent's joy here, and their crown of rejoicing hereafter. It will greatly add to their happiness, even in heaven, to find that their offspring, trained up by themselves, have followed them in the road to glory, honour and immortality

Let me, in the next place, address myself to those who have been tried by long and sharp afflictions, pain of body, or distress of mind. You have been long in the school of wisdom, and of virtue. What have you learned? you have seen and experienced much of the vanity of the world, and of its insufficiency to make you happy. You have been abundantly convinced, that there is no rest or portion for immortal beings as you are. You have seen how uncertain and precarious are all the things of this world. Are you then more weaned from it, and are your affections more set upon

upon heaven and heavenly things; or are you still as apt to be delighted with the follies and vanities of it as others are, who have seen only the fair and delusive side of things? you perhaps have had near views of death, and of the unseen world. Are your minds properly impressed with the consideration of them, and with the importance of being at all times ready to receive your summons from this world to another?

By long sickness, you have been taught the value of *health*. Are you then more careful to improve it? you have seen that what many trust to, viz. a death bed repentance, is not to be depended upon. You have found that a body full of pain, and a mind necessarily attentive to the feelings of the body, are very unfit for such an important work. Are you then more careful to secure the good part in time; that whenever you come to die, the great business of life may be done, and you may have nothing to do but to die?

Your faith, your patience, and your fortitude, have been more particularly tried. Are you more perfect in the exercise of them? Are you more resigned to the will of God, more humble, more submissive, more thankful for the mixture of good which you will certainly find to accompany all evils;

vils; and do you feel more compassion for others who are in a similar state of affliction, than for those who have not been so tried and disciplined?

In short, can you say with David, *before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned to keep thy righteous testimonies.* For sickness, or afflictions of any other kind, no less than health and prosperity, are things for which God will call us to account. Whatever we may think of them, they are *talents*, put into our hands, to be valued, and improved, for the greatest purposes; and if we be barren and unfruitful under those dispensations of providence, we shall be justly punished for having neglected, and abused, the best opportunity that God affords any of the sons of men of attending to *the things that relate to their everlasting peace and welfare.*

Active service is not indeed expected from you, whose afflictions and infirmities evidently unfit you for it. God, who knows your frame and situation, will not expect it. In this respect, therefore, you will be excused if you do even less than others. But then it is expected that you should shine in the exercise of the *passive virtues* as they are called, in patience, in humility, in self-denial, and in mortification to the world, as also in sym-

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pathy with others in benevolence and charity. This is your province, and in these respects it is justly required that you do more than others, whose health and prosperity has not given them the same opportunity for the exercise of those particular virtues. And if in these respects you do excel others, remember for your consolation, the words of the apostle. That *these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work out for you a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory.*

I might in like manner address other classes of persons, who are possessed of singular advantages for virtue and usefulness, especially those whose more ample fortunes, better understandings, superior knowledge, or peculiar situations, give them the *power* of doing more than others. If these things be of the nature of *favours*, as certainly they are, because they are the means of adding to our own happiness, as well as that of others, a principle of gratitude to the giver of all good should lead them to be thankful for them, and to improve them. And we should ever remember, that nothing is given us for our own sakes alone. In all these respects, we are but *stewards* of the grace and goodness of God, and should be faithful to the *trust* committed to us; as we shall certainly be

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called to give an account of it. But these obligations are so obvious, that they are perfectly intelligible to all persons, and therefore require no illustration.

Let all those persons who are possessed of whatever themselves and the world consider as *advantages*, ask themselves, what they do more than others, who are destitute of them. Better, my brethren, infinitely better were it to be poor, than to be rich and not generous; to be fools, than to be knaves; and to have been taught nothing at all, than to make a bad use of superior knowledge. It would have been better for us never to have heard of Christ than to be Christians in name only, and not in deed and in truth.

ON

HAVING OUR CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN.

For our Conversation is in Heaven.

PHILL. III. 20.

IF any person would act in a manner becoming his station, whatever it may be, he must frequently consider the *nature*, and the *object* of it; that he may the better judge what course of conduct is most suitable to it. Without frequent reflections of this kind, men are apt to forget themselves, to act out of character, and to fall into habits of doing things inconsistent with their place and profession.

The apostle Paul, in my Text, exhorting the church at Philippi to avoid the disorderly and scandalous life which some nominal christians at that time led, reminds them of the nature of their profession,

profession, and of the obligation which it necessarily laid them under to a sober life and conversation. *Brethren*, says he, V. 17. *be ye followers together with me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example: for many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things. For our conversation is in heaven; whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Observe, what stress the apostle lays upon the proper character, and the consequent necessary profession of a christian. It is *to have our conversation in heaven*, whereas those persons, whose irregularities he is pointing out to them, *minded earthly things*, a conduct, as he intimates, utterly inconsistent with their profession as christians, so that he scruples not to call them *the enemies of the cross of Christ*. And indeed in not complying with the main end and design of christianity, which, without all dispute, was to reform men's conduct, and to teach them to lead righteous and sober lives, they contradicted the whole scheme, and took the most effectual method to bring it into discredit, and contempt, with the Gentile world,

who from seeing the immoralities of christians, would naturally conclude, that christianity was not the thing that it was pretended to be; and that the apostles, under the specious pretence of reforming the world, were imposing upon it a religion, which, after all, left men as wicked and abandoned as it found them. With these men, therefore the apostle justly disclaims all connection, not considering them as the friends, but the enemies of christianity; and in order to prevent other professing christians from following their example, and sharing their unhappy fate, he here expostulates with those to whom he writes on the inconsistency there was between the disposition that these apostles shewed, and the genuine temper of christianity.

The character of these abandoned professors the apostle sums up in one word, when he says, *they minded earthly things.* This world, and the things of it, were their chief pursuit. The riches, the pleasures, or the honours of the world, engrossed all their affections, desires, and expectations. They were not solicitous about any thing else, being without any thought about a future world, or superior happiness; whereas the proper hopes of christians are necessarily in another life, with which

which their religion brings them acquainted. As the apostle elsewhere says, *if in this life only we have hope we are of all men the most miserable*; being disappointed in our principal object and pursuit.

It is in heaven, my brethren, that the true christian expects his reward. He is so fully persuaded of the reality, and the superior excellence, of the happiness of that state, consisting in the perfection of his rational nature, in all virtuous enjoyments, and in the favour of Almighty God, that nothing else can finally satisfy him. He is so much interested in heaven, and heavenly things, and has his mind so constantly employed about them, that he hardly considers himself as related to this world, but rather as a citizen of heaven, and only a stranger and sojourner here below. And this is, indeed, the proper meaning of the phrase *having our conversation in heaven*; for in the original it is *having our citizenship in heaven*, implying that heaven is the place to which a christian of right belongs. He is become a subject of that state, his dependence is intirely upon it, his treasure is lodged in it, and he is therefore chiefly concerned about it.

Every person, therefore, when he embraces

christianity, in effect renounces the world, with all the affections, lusts, and vanities of it. He enters his name as a citizen of another place; and if he be a true christian, he will sooner yield up his life to the rage of persecution, than renounce his interest in his own proper country. Nothing here below, not even life itself, is so dear to him, as that he would not readily part with it, rather than forfeit his title to an inheritance which he thinks to be infinitely more valuable than any earthly possession. Neither, says the apostle, do I account my life dear to me, so that I might finish my course with joy, that is, that I might live and die a christian, and enjoy the noble rewards of christianity.

These hints I propose, in discoursing upon these words, to enlarge upon, by considering, in the first place, on what account it is that christians have their citizenship in heaven, and then make some inferences, for the application of this doctrine.

I. In the first place christians may be said to have their citizenship in heaven, and not to be of this world, because their Lord and master was not of it. It is evident from the whole of our Lord's history, from his discourses, and from his conduct, that he was a person who absolutely renounced all

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the pleasures and profits of this world. For though it was in his power to have enjoyed all these things, in the greatest abundance and perfection, he chose to pass through life in comparatively indigent circumstances. When he might have supplied himself with every convenience of life, he was content frequently to want the very necessaries of it. For, as he himself said, *the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, when the son of man had not where to lay his head.* When he might have made himself acceptable to the rich and great, and his society was courted by some persons of rank and distinction, he declined their acquaintance, and for wise and benevolent purposes, rather chose the company of some of the lowest of mankind; insomuch that his enemies taking a malicious advantage of this circumstance, called him *a friend of publicans and sinners.*

Thus lived our Lord and master, as the prophet says, *despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;* and his death was agreeable to the tenor of his life. He might have prayed to his Father, who, as he said, would have sent legions of angels, to rescue him from the hands of his inveterate and bloody persecutors; but he chose rather to submit to all the cruelties

and indignities which their implacable malice made him undergo, till his hour was come, when he ended a laborious life with a painful and ignominious death upon the cross.

Is not this life and character agreeable to his own declaration, that *his kingdom was not of this world*? None of this world's goods, nothing that we short sighted creatures are so passionately fond of, and that we pursue with so much eagerness and constancy, was at all the object of his choice or pursuit, and notwithstanding his tempter exhibited them to him, in all their charms and glory, he saw nothing in them so desirable as the execution of the important, though painful, mission on which he was sent. He had much greater expectations, and *for the hope that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God; Angels, principalities and powers, being on that account made subject to him.*

Such, my brethren, was the life and uniform character of Christ, and such should ours also be, in all respects, if we be christians. For what is it to be a christian, in the most obvious sense of the word, but to be *a follower of Christ;* to have the same views and designs, arising from the same inward

inward temper of mind, the same expectations, and the same hopes, so as to be ready to take part with him in all that he met with. For if we have quite other dispositions of mind, and other pursuits, how can we pretend to be followers of him. It would be as if in travelling, we should profess to follow some particular guide, and yet should chuse a contrary road to that which he took. By such conduct as this we could not expect to arrive at the same place. In like manner, if we be not followers of Christ in this world, we must not expect to sit down with him in glory and happiness hereafter. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

III. To be a follower, or disciple, of Christ, is to submit to his directions and commands. For to disobey the commands of Christ is to reject his authority; and if we reject the authority of Christ where is our christianity. Now hath not our Lord expressly said that *whosoever will come after him, he must take up his cross and follow him*? Hath he not, in the most peremptory manner, forbidden our attachment to any thing in this world, when it is in danger of interfering with our obedience to him? Has he not said, *he that loveth house or land, father or mother, wife or friend, more than me, is not worthy of me*?

Let us beware then how we set our affections upon any things here below, and become anxious about any earthly enjoyment. For in so doing we both cease to follow the example of Christ, and likewise disregard his most express commands. Consequently, we renounce our discipleship to him, and that happiness which is reserved for his proper disciples and followers in a future state. For with what justice can we plead to share with him the honour and the happiness to which he is advanced, if we both reject his authority, and are unwilling to share with him in the difficulties and trials through which he passed to attain them? It is, therefore, only a cheerful submission to the authority of Christ, and a conformity of our lives and tempers to his, that can give us a title to the happiness of heaven, or, in the language of my text, *a right of citizenship there*.

III. Christians have their citizenship in heaven, and are not properly of this world, because it is implied in the very nature of their christian profession; and the more attention we give to it, the more sensible we shall be how inconsistent it is with our principal attachment being to this world, and the things of it. For only consider what is christianity, what was the design of Christ being

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sent into the world, by his God and father, and of his sending the apostles into the world. Was it not to reform and to amend it? Was it not, in the language of the apostle, *to teach men to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live righteous, sober and pious lives*? Was it not, as the same apostle says, to teach us to mortify our members that are of the earth, that is, to subdue our lust of sensual pleasure, to check all worldly ambition, to teach us to disregard wealth and splendour, and to cure us of all envy and malice? Was it not in short to check and mortify all those inordinate affections and passions which have this world, and the things of it, for their object and end?

Do not the plainest rules of the gospel engage us to *deny ourselves*, and to forego many pleasures and advantages of this world because they cannot be enjoyed with a good conscience, and is it not manifest from all this, that it could not be the design of christianity to qualify men for the enjoyment of this world chiefly, since it is rather calculated to wean our affections from it? For if we be allowed to have no pride, no ambition, no sensuality, no malice, or revenge, how can our chief happiness consist in this world, since it is in the gratification of these passions chiefly that the hap-

piness of the *worldly minded* consists. What are the precepts of christianity, but rules of sobriety, humility, justice, benevolence, and piety; affections the most disinterested and heavenly, in which consists the perfection of human nature, and our preparation for another and a better state.

Now since christianity tends to make us indifferent about those things which the worldly minded pursue with so much eagerness and constancy, and since it raises our affections towards nobler and remote objects, it is evident that Christ, by teaching his disciples this temper and disposition, did not design that their happiness should consist in the enjoyment of this world. The very nature of their institution, demonstrates that they are intended for another and better country. Their religion, raises their hopes and expectations of something better than any thing that this world affords, and actually forms them for it; and our Lord will not disappoint the expectations which he has raised in their minds, or refuse them that high sphere of action and enjoyment, for which, by obeying his commands, and following his example, they are actually trained.

Upon the whole then, we see that it properly belongs to a Christian to be constantly looking above

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and beyond this present world. Sensible that comparatively speaking, he has no interest worth pursuing here, he will employ his thoughts and meditations upon that *more enduring substance* which is reserved for him in Heaven. His proper treasure is no where but in heaven. There therefore, is his heart, and there is his conversation, in the usual acceptation of the term. For where a man's treasure or chief happiness is, there will be his heart and affections, and that will be the subject of his daily thoughts and conversation.

To become a Christian therefore, is in effect to break off our strongest attachments to this world, and the things of it. It is to cease to look upon any thing that this world affords as our chief good. It is as we may say, to throw up our interest here, and to build on a more sure and solid foundation, not upon the sandy foundation of worldly enjoyments, which are so apt to deceive us, but upon a rock which no temporary accident can shake.

Except this be our disposition, we have no more than the *name* of Christians, nor that indeed justly, for a worldly minded Christian is an absurdity. Otherwise it would be possible to serve God and Mammon; whereas the heart of man can have no

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more than one chief object of its desire, or one chief good; and it is the nature of this chief good, that which men most value and esteem, which manifests their disposition, and determines their character.

If what we chiefly prize, what our hearts and affections are most eagerly set upon, and what we are most of all bent to obtain, be any of the pleasures and advantages of this world, we forfeit all our title to heaven and heavenly things. For these things will not hold a second place in our esteem. But if, in consequence of looking upon this world as a thing that is precarious and unsatisfactory, it be the most earnest wish of our hearts to secure the favour of God, and the happiness of heaven; if it be our chief care and concern to approve our hearts before him, by an uniform course of well-doing; if we be careful to obey the precepts, and to copy the example of our Lord and master Jesus Christ, and if, when we are properly called to it, we be ready, rather than violate our conscience, to abandon every thing that is dear to us in life, and even life itself, we may then, but in no other case, conclude that we are Christians indeed, we have placed our treasure and our hearts in heaven, and there will be our reward at last.

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I have now shewn on what accounts Christians may be said not to belong to this world, but to be citizens of heaven. It is because the kingdom of Christ was not of this world, and because both his express precepts, and the very spirit of his religion, require that our affections should be weaned from the present state, and fixed upon a future and a better. I now proceed to make some inferences from the doctrine, thus laid down and enforced.

I. This doctrine may teach us the great value of Christianity, as it extends our views to great and remote objects, and thereby gives us a superiority of mind to this world, and all the transitory enjoyments and pursuits of it. Great views indicate, and indeed constitute great minds; and thus the prospects of Christianity, by drawing off the attention from every thing mean, base, and unworthy of us, prevents their engaging our affections, and exciting any inordinate passion. What charms can sensual pleasure, worldly gain, or worldly ambition, have for that man whose mind is habitually occupied with the thoughts that he is born to infinitely greater expectations, with which those lower pursuits are wholly inconsistent, and who suffers those great, tho' distant objects to make a suitable impression upon him. What

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exalted characters would Christianity make us, if we gave due attention to its precepts, and governed ourselves and conduct by them?

These sentiments we should more carefully impress upon our minds, as we live in a time of rest from persecution; so that the pleasures and the cares of the world have a better opportunity of laying hold upon us. During persecution Christians naturally associate together, and encourage one another by discoursing on Christian principles, so that they become familiar to the mind, and form the character. Whereas, when there is no particular occasion for this, and the greatest part of our time is employed about secular affairs, and in conversing with the world at large, we are in great danger of conforming to it, of catching the spirit and the principles of the times we live in. And such is the general turn of things, and such the disposition and pursuits of the bulk of mankind, that now, as well as formerly, *to be the friend of the world, is to be the enemy of God.*

Considering the turn of mind that generally prevails in the world, the almost universal attachment to the pursuits of pleasure, honour, or gain, which tend to exclude all thoughts of religion, and indispose the mind to any attention to the subject, we cannot

cannot wonder at the prevalence and increase of infidelity. In this state of mind something of much less force than a satisfactory argument, and indeed something very different from argument, will be sufficient to make men unbelievers.

Many become so by the perversion of particular passages of scripture, which by this means are easily turned into ridicule; others by coarse jests, and unfounded assertions; and others by absurd doctrines and practices, which too many christians have ignorantly adopted, and which are held forth as essential parts of the scheme, to which they are wholly discordant, but which superficial thinkers, and those who secretly wish for a pretence for rejecting it, will not take the pains to compare with the scriptures themselves.

III. If this doctrine be true, if christians are not of this world, but have their citizenship and conversation in heaven, if this be the object towards which their thoughts are habitually directed, so that they would be ready to abandon every thing in this world for the sake of their interest in another, what shall we say of the greater part of *nominal christians*, who in reality never look beyond this world, but whose minds are wholly engrossed by the things of it?

If

If such persons attend public worship at all, it is because decency, or a respect to their friends and connections, make it necessary or convenient for them. They never discover by their conversation, or in any other way, that they have any religion at all. If they have a taste for reading, it is not the bible, or any book of religion that is ever found in their hands.

Can such persons as these expect that, at the second coming of Christ, an event to which they never voluntarily direct their thoughts, they will be considered as the friends and followers of Christ? They cannot have any just claim to such a distinction. They may be valuable characters in other respects, as husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants, &c. and therefore are not to be classed with the *wicked*; but they cannot have any just title to the proper rewards of christianity.

Neither can they expect to be treated as those who never heard of Christ, since they have treated with neglect, if not with contempt, a messenger expressly sent by God to man, with a commission of the most important nature, respecting their conduct here and their expectations hereafter. Besides, without this respect to futurity, and such great

great prospects as christianity opens to us, it is naturally impossible that they should attain to that noble elevation of mind, and that great dignity of character which is inspired by them; so that with respect to proper intellectual improvement they must rank below the meanest christians, who have imbibed the genuine spirit of their religion. Having had the opportunity of being acquainted with the evidences of christianity, and having had rational and just views of it presented to them, they are under a serious responsibility with respect to it; and as the apostle forewarns them, they will not escape without punishment if they neglect so great a means of salvation. But with respect to them, as well as to all mankind, we may be assured that *the great judge of all the earth will do that which is right.*

III. If christianity have this dignity in itself, and this tendency to exalt the characters of men, no christian should be ashamed of his profession; but be ready upon all occasions not only to avow it, but to give a reason for the hope that is in him. This public profession of christianity is absolutely required by our religion. If we do not confess our Lord before men, he will not confess, but he

will deny, us, before his heavenly Father, and the holy angels.

Indeed, this open profession of christianity is necessary to the successful propagation of it in the world; and when men of reflection see other persons, of as good understanding as themselves, who have given more attention to the subject than they have done, and who have no apparent motive for professing to believe what they do not, persist in a serious and uniform profession of their belief of christianity; and above all when they see that their lives are habitually governed by the great principles of it, it must make them pause, and consider whether such a faith be not well founded. And if christianity be true it's evidence must appear satisfactory to all persons who, with an unprejudiced mind, shall examine and consider it.

As we should not be ashamed of christianity itself, the same obligation naturally extends to whatever we deem to be pure christianity, as opposed to the corruptions and abuses which have been introduced into it. All these it is our duty strenuously to oppose, regardless of whatever the defenders of them may say of us, or do to us. We should be ready even to rejoice that we are counted

worthy

worthy to incur shame, to suffer loss, or even to lay down our lives, in so glorious a cause.

IV. Let this doctrine more especially teach us moderation in all our pursuits and enjoyments here below. It is not our chief, or most important happiness, that is depending here. These are only temporary gratifications, which we must shortly resign. They do not therefore deserve such extreme anxiety and solicitude. No, let those *whose God is their belly, whose glory is their shame, and who mind earthly things, say, let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.* Let them make the most of this life, because it is all their portion. But this, I trust, is not our case. If we be truly christians, our treasure is in heaven, and therefore the object of our chief care and concern is safe, out of the reach of all worldly accidents; and being satisfied that this is the case, we may surely make ourselves easy about these temporary accommodations, and *in whatever state* it shall please divine providence to place us, *therewith to be content, and thankful.*

Thirdly, it behoves us, if we have any regard to the credit of our religion, and the opinion that men will form of our sincerity in the profession of it, to manifest a christian indifference towards this world

and all the things of it. For if, to all appearance, we be as anxious about worldly pleasures, wealth, and honours, as other men are, and as eager in the pursuit of them, we give the world too much reason to think that we place our *happiness* in them, as much as they do; and that all the affection and regard that we profess to have for another country and a *more enduring substance*, is merely a vain pretence, when, in reality, this world has as full possession of our hearts, as it has of theirs.

V. If our treasure, our hearts, and our conversation, be in heaven, let us more especially bear with patience and cheerfulness all the evils of life. They are but for a time, and it is a noble consolation, that if we meet with the same treatment from this world that our Lord met with from it, if we suffer on the same account; that is, in consequence of bearing our testimony against the errors and vices of it, we give the clearest proof that we are his disciples, and then we may say, *if the world hate us, it hated likewise our blessed master*, and *if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him, and be glorified together. Let us* then, my brethren, *comfort one another with these words, and continue steadfast, and immoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord; as knowing that our labour shall not finally be in vain in the Lord.*

DOING ALL

TO THE

GLORY OF GOD.

Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Cor. X. 31.

SINCE all the actions of a rational creature ought to be directed to some end; there should be something that we propose, and aim at by the whole course of our conduct; something to which, amidst all the variety of subordinate pursuits we are necessarily engaged in, we may from time to time have recourse to, as a standard, by which to judge of the propriety of our conduct in general, or any particular scene or action of our lives. To act at random, to follow the dictates of the present prevailing passion or inclination, whatever it be, without reflecting upon the tendency, justness, or measure of it, is to act in no higher a capacity than what the brutes are capable of. In such an unreflecting way of life, no use is made of reason.

That faculty from which we derive our superiority to the brutes, and by which we hold the rank allotted to us in the system of nature, is entirely neglected, and in effect lost. And how is it possible that we should live up to the purpose and design of human nature, without exerting that faculty which constitutes us men, and rational creatures? How can we answer the end for which we were made? And how can we arrive at that state of ease, satisfaction, and happiness, that no creature can enjoy that is not perfectly adapted to the sphere of life assigned to it? which must depend upon the improvement and exercise of those powers which are suited to its kind, and answer to its station. Do we esteem any creature, that does not excel in what creatures of his kind are best qualified and expected to excel in? in like manner, with respect to men, whatever accomplishments they are masters of, if they do not acquit themselves as men, excel in what men are most fitted to excel in, they cannot be allowed to have any true merit: they are aiming at something above, or something below human nature; and must be losing themselves in the esteem of every being, who hath a full comprehension of the condition and end of our nature.

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Let us then, as we wish to excel, and to be happy in our proper excellence, set out upon these just maxims: to bring to perfection those faculties which are most properly manly, and rational: to propose to ourselves an end worthy of our nature, and regulate and adjust our subordinate pursuits, and the common actions of our lives, by a regard to this end.

The enquiry that naturally arises from these observations is, what is this great, proper, and worthy end of human life? What are those attainments, which are most properly manly, and befitting us? What is that course of life, the prosecution of which will be attended with the most complete and growing satisfaction, and secure to us the esteem of all, who are the best judges of our merit? This I shall endeavour to explain in discoursing from the words of the apostle in my text, whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

1st. Ascertaining, what we are to understand by the Glory of God.

2d. The reasonableness and advantage of consulting the Glory of God in all our actions.

The true sense of the phrase (the Glory of

God) will be the easiest to come at, by attending to the subject of the Apostle's discourse, with what goes immediately before, and after these words. There had been in the church of Corinth some difference of sentiment about the lawfulness of eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols, and the apostle Paul was applied to (as it seems by letter) to decide the difference; which he does with great judgment and wisdom, in the following manner. *As an idol*, says he, *is nothing in the world*, or of no more worth or importance than the wood or stone which represents it; *and the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*, and designed by him for the use of man; the dedication of meat to an idol, does no way affect the goodness of it, or render it unfit to be applied to the use for which it was intended: Should the consecration of a thing to a being so imaginary and impotent, render the goodness of God of none effect to those who acknowledge his goodness in providing it for them, by giving thanks for it, who have no faith in the divine power of the idol to which it is consecrated, and do not look upon it as an acknowledgment of the divinity of the idol. *Whatever* provision *therefore is sold in the shambles*

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that, says the apostle, *eat, asking, no questions for conscience sake:* And again, *if any of them that believe not, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no questions for conscience sake: But*, says he, *if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice to idols*; if he appear to be scrupulous about the lawfulness of eating it, *eat not, for his sake that shewed it, and for his conscience sake.* After which follow the words of my text: *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God. Giving none offence, neither to the Jew or Gentile, or to the church of God. Even*, says he, *as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.* From whence we may infer that to eat or drink without any regard to the prejudice of the weak and conscientious, so as to disquiet their minds, and tempt them, in imitation of us, to sin in acting contrary to their consciences, is not to eat and drink to the glory of God; and therefore that to eat and drink, or do any thing, to the glory of God, is to act in such a manner, even in the most ordinary occasions of life, as shall be least to the prejudice, and most to the advantage, of the virtue, and happiness, of our fellow

creatures: Which implies, that we should live according to the laws of sobriety and virtue ourselves, and by our example and influence, promote the same regard to them in all we converse with. Hereby we shall secure to ourselves the most solid and rational satisfaction in this life, and attain to consummate happiness with all the virtuous and the good, in the life to come. And will not God be glorified when all his creatures that resemble himself, and are worthy of it, are happy as he himself is happy?

For, by another method of investigation, it may be made to appear, that the glory of God consists in the virtue and happiness of men. Is not God glorified when all his purposes and designs are fully accomplished? and all the creatures he hath made answer the end for which he made them? Now, what can we conceive to be a more worthy end of the divine action, than the happiness of his creatures? And what is a fitter means to promote this end than virtue? This we are convinced of, not only because it is most agreeable to the amiable ideas we naturally conceive of the Divine Being; but it is a truth which every appearance in nature suggests and confirms. It being the will of God, therefore, that we should attain to

virtue

virtue and happiness, then is God glorified by us, when we do attain to virtue and happiness, or are in the way to attain it.

It is in this sense that the heavens declare the glory of God; as they display his wisdom, power, and goodness, and thereby answer the end for which they were created. In like manner, when brute beasts follow the propensities of their natures, and enjoy the share of happiness allotted to them, they answer the end for which they were made, and in them is their maker glorified. And for the same reason, then, and then only, is God glorified in us, when we love and follow virtue, and are in the way to the happiness to which it leads, because for this end it was, that we were made.

Thus you see that to glorify God, in the scripture sense of the word, is the very same thing as to honour and serve God; for God is equally glorified, and honoured, and served by us, when we obey his will, and live righteously, and soberly, and godly in the present world. This too perfectly agrees with what our Saviour calls glorifying God, John XV, 8. In this is my Father glorified, when ye bring forth much fruit. That is the fruits of righteousness. And with the apostle

elsewhere: this is the will of God even our sanctification.

Observe, however, that eating and drinking, or doing any ordinary action of life, to the glory of God, does not imply that we should every moment attend to the glory of God, that it should be the immediate motive of all our actions; but only that it should ever be the ultimate motive of them; that which we should recur to from time to time, until we shall have acquired a habit of observing the rules of temperance, sobriety, and virtue in all we do; even without expressly attending to the consideration of the glory of God, in every particular action.

Before I proceed to the next head, I shall just take notice, what monstrous absurdities we are apt to run into, when we imagine that the glory of God consists in any thing else than the prevalence of virtue and religion in the world; or when we think to substitute any thing else in the place of real substantial virtue. If we take upon us to substitute one thing in the place of virtue, we may, upon the same authority, and with the same ease, substitute one thousand, for there is no setting bounds to the imaginations of men, distempered, and rendered more fertile of invention, by superstition.

sition. But most pernicious is that error by which men imagine that they glorify God, not by mercy, forbearance, and benevolence; but the diabolical engines of hatred, malice, and persecution. As if God was glorified, not in the happiness, but in the destruction of his creatures: As if it was the most effectual way to recommend themselves to the favour of God, to counteract his own gracious intentions and conduct; and to breathe a spirit, the most contrary to that mercy and clemency, with which he ever acts towards mankind.

2d. I consider the reasonableness and advantage of consulting the glory of God, as it has been explained above.

I shall avoid entering into a long detail of the obligations we lie under to consult the glory of God, and to shun every thing in our conduct that might dishonour him, by giving offence to, or any way injuring, our fellow creatures; and shall content myself with summing them up as briefly as possible. Since it may be shown in a very few words, that all the obligations that are deemed fit to enforce obedience to any superior on earth, concur to enforce our obedience to God; besides several

veral obligations which are peculiar to this, the highest of all our connexions and relations.

1st. We are under obligation to glorify and serve God as our creator and preserver. This is an inference which St. Paul teaches us to draw from this consideration. Since we are not our own, let us glorify God with bodies and with souls which are his. Shall I prostitute those members of my body, or powers of my mind, to any other use, than that for which they were given me? Is not the end for which he made them the noblest for which they could be made? Shall I then, either vainly presume to mend the design, or impiously presume to contradict him, in what I am sensible is wisest and best? To use the argument of the apostle, Hath not the potter power over the clay? Are not my passions of his forming and moulding? Should they not then be applied to the purposes for which he intended them? And am not I criminal in indulging them to my own or others prejudice, contrary to his gracious intention? Should not my reason conform itself to the dictates of that eternal reason, from which it is derived? And should not conscience be put into the full possession of all the power and influence, my maker intended it should have? Let me not then dispute

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the authority of God. Or, with the potters vessel, in the apostle, absurdly ask, why hast thou made me thus? My powers of body and of mind are not my own, and therefore not at my disposal, but I am accountable to him, that made me, for the purposes to which I apply them.

2d. Setting aside the authority of God, as our creator, gratitude should oblige us to consult the glory of God in all our actions. An ingenious mind that is sensible of its obligations, and of the pleasure of its benefactor, cannot hesitate what part it has to act. To return the obligation, is its first thought, its immediate resolution, and its fixed steady pursuit. Are any of us ignorant what God hath done for us? Is it not from him that we derive all our capacity for pleasure, and all our means of avoiding pain? Hath he not provided us with pleasures proper and sufficient to satisfy all the regular calls of nature? Hath he not crowned our lives with loving kindness and tender mercies? What is the whole course of our lives, but a continued experience of the goodness of God? Who is the giver of every good, and of every perfect gift, and of whom do we receive, life, breath, and all things? And is not every mercy we receive at the hands of God, of the nature of our obligation to

study,

study, and conform ourselves to, his will and pleasure; to consult his glory rather than our own? And should we not deny ourselves the most favorite gratification, upon understanding, that the indulgence of our desire in this case, would be looked upon as a slight or dishonour cast upon him.

Knowing then that the will of God is the virtue and happiness of men, should we not, setting aside all private regards, disinterestedly, and from a principle of gratitude to God, study the welfare and edification of our fellow creatures; and avoid anything, however innocent in itself, and to us, that might wound and hurt their minds? This is the love of God that we keep his commandments; that we conduct ourselves in such a manner, as will be most pleasing to him, and beneficial to mankind, and in this is God glorified. By the shining example of a virtuous life and conversation, we should provoke to love and to good works; because when our light shines before men, others see, and are induced to imitate our good works, and thereby glorify our Father who is in Heaven.

3d. Our obligation to serve and glorify God, may be further enforced and illustrated, by comparing it with human obligations, of a parallel, though inferior nature. Should servants, consult

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the pleasure and the honour of their master, and subjects of their sovereign? We too have a master in Heaven: We too are subjects to the king of kings, whose pleasure and honour we are under a like obligation to consult before all things else. And to act in disobedience to his commands, or to dishonour him, is in this light as the sin of rebellion, and treason. Should the filial affection of children prompt them to consult the pleasure and the honour of their parents; We too have a Father in Heaven, intitled to an infinitely higher regard: he is both more beneficent, and more wise in dispensing his favours; and therefore should command more of our affection and esteem.

Lastly, do all men think themselves, in some measure, obliged to maintain the honour of persons of distinguished abilities, and great worth? Alas, what are all human characters, to the all-perfect character of the ever-blessed God? What is their worth, merit or deserts compared to his! If then we shew so great zeal for the honour of men we admire; Should not we be more zealously affected in a better cause? Should we not enter more warmly into the interests of virtue; because it is the cause of God; and labour to promote

promote the virtue and happiness of our fellow creatures; because we know, that this is what the Divine Being is most intent upon; in this he is most glorified; and in this manner we are most capable of expressing our zeal and attachment to that Being, who hath deserved so well of us, and all mankind.

4th. When we are actuated by a zeal for the glory of God, we, in the most effectual manner, consult our own glory. Is not that course of life by which we glorify God the most perfective of our natures, and consequently that which is attended with the noblest, and most refined satisfaction, and that which will raise us the highest in the esteem of every being who is a judge, and especially of him who is the best judge, of true worth? Compared to this, how empty! how precarious! how short-lived! how insignificant! is the glory that results from any other qualification. There is no praise like that which is founded on virtue: if any thing else be the ground of it, instead of elevating, ennobling, and improving the mind; it only serves to swell and corrupt the heart that is fondly pleased with it.

That in living to the glory of God we consult the perfection and glory of our nature, is evident; because

because the glory of God consists and terminates in the perfection, and happiness of all his creatures. Here therefore the noblest, and the most interested motives of action unite, and concur to enforce the same maxims of conduct, and the same course of life. Indeed, so happy is the present constitution of things, that not only those which are always the noblest, and most worthy, but those which show themselves to be in fact the strongest, and the most powerful, motives of action, if rightly understood, lead to, and enforce the practice of virtue: so that whatever be our darling passion, it only requires to be rightly understood, and it can never mislead us: we may allow men, for instance to be influenced by the love of pleasure, so that it be but true, lasting, pleasure; to give wholly into the pursuit of gain, so it be true substantial gain, what will in the end appear to be so; to thirst for honour and applause, so that they be not deceived in their notions of honour, and mistake not the false and delusive, for the true and substantial; so they do not, like the Pharisees, love the praise of men, more than the praise of God. And, conversely; if we are careful so to live as to glorify God in our actions, if our conduct be such as shall cast no reproach upon our maker, we may make ourselves

ourselves easy about our own glory, our own pleasure, or our own advantage; for all those will certainly appear in the train, among the attendants, and in the consequences of virtue. This is that wisdom, which hath in its right hand length of days, and in its left hand riches and honour.

Let our views then be single; so that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God; so as to honour him by the wisdom and moderation we observe in all our gratifications and pursuits; and we may assure ourselves, that we are those whom God will delight to honour and reward. A zeal for his glory and honour, is what no selfish consideration will make us repent of; for he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will be withhold, from them that walk uprightly.

RESIGNA-

RESIGNATION

TO THE

WILL OF GOD.

It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. 1. SAM. III. 18.

IN these words we are presented with a most amiable view of the character of Eli. Notwithstanding a considerable flaw in his character, for which his family was justly deprived of the priesthood, his heart must, in the main, have been right towards God, when he could hear the news of the greatest calamity and dishonour, that could befal his family with such devout composure.

The religious exercise of meditation on the being, perfections and providence of God must have been very familiar to his mind before the simple apprehension, that it was *God* who was the author of his affliction, could give him such immediate ease: *It is the Lord*, says this good

old man; that was enough. Without farther reasoning, it was a consequence familiar to his mind, what he had a full and practical persuasion of, that then all was right, *Let him do what seemeth him good.* They are the best formed minds, the most devoted to God, and approved by him, that are capable of reasoning in this manner, and of feeling immediate relief from it, in scenes of real distress.

But Eli, you will say, reasoned in this manner, in a situation truly calamitous, to relieve an extraordinary pressure upon his mind, and when there was peculiar occasion to walk humbly before God. You may therefore think that reflections of this kind are proper only in cases of like difficulty and distress; and you may be saying, are the ways of providence at this time peculiarly dark and mysterious, do you apprehend that we are in more than ordinary danger of repining, and being dissatisfied with our condition. Suppose that nothing of this be the case, though it must be so at all times with many individuals, and we ought all of us to feel for others, as well as for ourselves. But suppose that the world should now smile upon you, that, in the language of the scripture, *our mountain stands strong*, and there is

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no prospect of your being presently moved. Is your mind entirely composed, staid on God; and are you so entirely resigned to the will of providence, as that no unexpected event can shake your confidence and trust in God. If not, an address of this nature is not wholly unseasonable. And indeed this temper of resignation is a virtue in which we can never excel too much, and since it respects the deity, who is an infinite being, it is capable of unlimited increase. For it is always in proportion to our apprehension of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness; so that this disposition of mind can never be properly perfect while the Divine Being remains incomprehensible, which, to our finite understandings, he must always be. While, therefore, we may yet either know more of God, or conceive more strongly of his power, wisdom, and goodness, our confidence in him, and our resignation to his will, may be more complete.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall, in the first place, assign some reasons for a chearful acquiescence in the divine appointments, respecting ourselves, our friends, and the world. But previous to this, I must briefly state the true notion of trusting God, which may be defined to be a ha-

bit of recurring to God upon all occasions, and habitually regarding him as the first and proper cause of all things, and of all events. It is founded upon such a practical persuasion concerning the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, as shall engage us to believe that he will effectually provide for us, if we always endeavour to please him. Consequently, it excludes all anxiety about our present or future condition; but by no means such a concern as is sufficient to rouse us to the full exertion of all our faculties in the discharge of our duty, on which our present and future happiness entirely depend. In short, it is this persuasion, that *if we in the first place pursue the things that relate to the kingdom of God*, and his *righteousness*, *every thing else*, that is truly needful and proper for us, shall, in the exertion of our best endeavours, *be certainly added unto us*.

I now proceed to give the reason for chearful acquiescing in the divine appointment. And first, we must be convinced that, in respect to many things of which we are apt to complain, or the more remote causes of our hardships, such as the circumstances of our birth, education, and general fortune, in which our own determinations had no influence, it is not, nor ever was in our power

power to alter the course of things; and if we be governed by reason, it must be enough to silence all repining at our lot, to consider that our repining can avail nothing to alter it. Did what we are dissatisfied with in any way depend upon ourselves, as in cases where our vices and follies have influence, it might answer a good purpose to indulge painful reflections, as it might be a motive with us to recover the false steps which we had made, or at least to put us upon our guard for the future. In this case an easy acquiescence of mind is far from being proper, and ought by all means to be discouraged. But it is to take pleasure in tormenting ourselves to be distressed because things do not go as we wish them to do, when we know that they are, and always were, out of our power, and therefore that no anxiety that we can give ourselves can tend to relieve us.

While David imagined he might possibly prevail with God to spare the life of his child, he afflicted himself, and continued fasting and praying; but when he perceived that the child was dead, we read that he arose from the ground on which he had been prostrate, that he washed himself, and took some refreshment; for, says he, while the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept, for I said who can

tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live; but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again; I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. 2 Sam. XII, 22. This conduct argues the greatest strength of mind, which few can attain, but to which all ought to aim.

The proof of a reality of providence, I am persuaded, is unnecessary at this time. Things so wonderfully adjusted to one another, as the several parts of this system, argues the whole to be the result of consummate wisdom, and as the same wisdom still superintends every thing, we may assure ourselves that the whole will be brought to its destined perfections whatever attempts may be made to disturb the order of things, and to prevent its proper completion.

But besides this kind of evidence, we have, in the scripture, such assurance given us of it, as ought to silence all our doubts. We are there informed, that God will certainly *execute all his pleasure.* The proud king of Assyria, boasting of his wisdom and might, was only *a rod in the hand of God's anger*, and the still prouder Nebuchadnezzar was only his *hired servant.*

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Upon the whole, both reason and scripture concur to assure us, that every man's general station and lot in life, are appointed by a wise superintending providence; and as he gives the kingdoms of this world to whomsoever he pleases, so the affairs of individuals are not less particularly attended to, in the great comprehensive plan of the universe. He has given us all *a set time, and bounds*, which we can neither pass, nor remove. And though, in many cases, his ways are a great deep, and his footsteps in mighty waters, it is no objection to the reality of the thing.

Is then our situation in life not so advantageous and agreeable as we could wish, let us not repine at it; because, we are just where God thought fit to place us, but let us make the best improvement of it, and get the most perfect enjoyment of it that we can. Even with respect to the difficulties that have befallen us by reason of others, or by ourselves, we ought still to look beyond both others and ourselves, unless we consider ourselves and others, and indeed the whole human race, as out of the plan and reach of that providence which controuls all things. In cases where men are the immediate causes of particular events, and consequently, where blame and self reproach have the

greatest propriety and effect, we ought not to *confine* our views to men. They cannot be any thing more than secondary causes, and we ought to look beyond them to the first and primary cause of all things, to that great being who over-rules even the follies and vices of men, and makes them the instrument of his great and good designs.

Joseph could not but be sensible that it was by the malice and wicked contrivance of his brethren, that he was sold into Egypt; yet when he saw the great and good purpose that was answered by it, he could say, with peculiar satisfaction, that it was *God* who had sent him before them into that country. David well knew the malice of Shimei, and retained a proper resentment of it; but yet he could say, even the in moment of his greatest provocation, *let him curse, for God has bid him curse.* What true piety, and greatness of mind was that.

Our Saviour also, who knew what there was in man, well knew that it was the outrageous malice of the Jews that was the immediate cause of his cruel sufferings and death, and he was not sparing of his invectives against them, and yet knowing the design of God, and the infinite advantage that his dying in those circumstances would be of to the world, he received his afflictions as from *the hand*

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of God. "The cup," says he, "that my father "gives me to drink, shall not I drink it."

With respect to the difficulties we bring upon ourselves by our follies and vices, shame, and remorse are certainly proper, and indeed unavoidable. They ought therefore to be indulged, until they have answered their purpose, by correcting the disposition of the mind which was the cause of our improper conduct. But still we ought not to forget that there is a will above ours, and that comprehends ours; that it is God who suffers us to fall, and that whatever we may have intended, he no doubt, has the best end to answer by our failings, as well as those of others. We should therefore humble ourselves before him, and confide in him; assuring ourselves, that when, by means of the course of discipline to which he has wisely subjected us here, we shall be sufficiently exercised and improved, an end will be put to the troubles we bring upon ourselves, as well as to those which others bring upon us.

Secondly, to this reason for acquiescing in the divine disposals, drawn from the consideration of our incapacity to alter the course of things, we may subjoin another, which is, that, if we could

could alter it, there is no reason why we should wish to have it altered. For, the affairs of the world, and of all men, are already in the best hands, so that no regard to our private happiness, or that of society, can be justly alarmed whatever turn the course of things may take. And this consideration should make us perfectly easy in all cases, where we have no influence. We want no proof that the God *in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways*, who does whatever he pleases in the armies of Heaven above, and among the inhabitants of the earth here beneath, is more concerned then even we ourselves can be for the happiness of his creatures. In all his works of creation or providence, we see that he is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works. This is true, even of his greatest judgments. Is there any evil in a city, says the prophet, and the Lord has not done it? Can any thing befal us, or others, without his permission, or express appointment? And if it be within the compass of his intention, can it produce any thing contrary to his intention; that is, any thing contrary to the designs of perfect wisdom and goodness.

All

All the works of God are of a piece, however different they may appear at first view; and we may assure ourselves, that they all uniformly concur in promoting some great design, worthy of the divine power, wisdom and goodness. *Affections*, we read, *come not from the dust*, nor do *troubles spring out of the ground*, as if they came by *chance*, or without design. What we call *chance*, can have no place in the works of God, for nothing can happen unforeseen or unintended by him, and if nothing comes to pass without his design, nothing comes to pass without the most kind and gracious design possible. We may some time, like Jacob, be apt to say, *all these things are against us;* but it is our ignorance, as it was his, that dictates the language. What we call unfriendly occurrences, come in fact with the mostly friendly intention, only we happen to mistake their meaning.

As soon as we shall have got a good understanding of the ways and works of God, we shall perceive that they all speak the same language, and look to the same end. All the works of God praise him, and wear the most favourable aspect towards the subjects of his government, and the objects of his care. Storms and tempests are as much the voice of a benevolent and gracious God, as the *sound of the small*

small rain upon the tender grass, to use the language of the psalmist; or any other, the most pleasing accents in nature. Such is the perfect harmony through all the works of God, that even the sun, moon and stars, and every thing the psalmist enumerates, things the most distant in place, and the most opposite in nature, join, as we may say, in the same hymn of praise to God. It is true their tone is different, but, if we may pursue this figure, they differ as the several parts of an excellent piece of music, and when heard together, make the most perfect harmony.

So when, in some future period of our existence, and from a more advantageous point of view, we shall take a larger survey of the works of creation and providence, when we shall see them in the light in which God himself sees them, according to their TRUE, though often remote relations and uses, we shall pronounce them all to have been *very good*, admirably calculated to be, or to make, happy. We shall then see, to adopt the language of the apostle Paul, that *all things have been ours, that life or death, things prosperous or things adverse, have worked together for our good.* We shall then see that our having been from time to time deprived of several enjoyments, which then cost

cost us many tears, and involved us in deep distress, were the very best things that could have befallen us; and that to have had our wishes gratified in those circumstances, would have been in danger of alienating our minds from God and our duty; and by putting us out of our proper pursuit, would have plunged us at length in deeper and more lasting distress. We may then probably tremble to think how narrowly we escaped the most imminent dangers, and see that had we been suffered to proceed, as we then wished, we should have been inevitably lost.

Timely chastisements are, certainly, the most benevolent parts of the divine conduct. There is nothing that, in general, we all stand in greater need of; and in many cases nothing could be more hurtful to us than success in our favourite pursuits. It is happy for us that God does not always answer us according to our own meaning in our prayers. How possible is it that we may be most earnest in our prayers for what would infallibly ruin us, and desire with all importunity to be delivered from a thing which would constitute or ultimately produce our greatest good.

This ignorance of our own best good should teach us not to be either *particular*, or *importunate*, in

in our prayers, but always to express ourselves with great latitude, and a most entire resignation. God knows all our wants, and therefore has no need that we should inform him of them; nor does he want any good-will towards us, if we have taken care, by doing our duty, to make ourselves proper objects of his favour; so that he hath already every *disposition* that we should wish to excite in him. But by praying we express the sense we have of our dependence upon him, and of our obligations to him; and we should express ourselves in such a manner as that our language shall imply no more; and least of all, any thing that should look like *dictating* to him what he should do for us. Our business is solely with our own minds, our own tempers and dispositions. Farther than this is wholly within the sphere of providence and we have nothing to do, but to submit, and rejoice.

Thirdly, without resignation to the will of God, in disagreeable situations and prospects, the end of our afflictions cannot be answered, and consequently we ourselves shall be the losers. Men are by their frame and their obvious connections designed for a state of trial and discipline, and the scriptures every where suppose and consider us in such

a state. We are so placed, that the circumstances we are in, and the various incidents of our lives, all appointed by divine providence, are adapted to affect our tempers and dispositions; and they are all capable of affecting us, either favourably or unfavourably. Whether our circumstances be prosperous or adverse, they may either improve our minds in virtue, or they may lead us farther off from the paths of virtue, and consequently of happiness. But so wise and gracious is the appointment of all things, that nothing befals but what *may* be made a means of good to us. There is no event in our lives, but, if it be considered in a proper light, and be duly meditated upon, may have the most happy effect on our minds, and prepare us for our proper happiness; at the same time that, if we receive them in a different manner, they may have the most fatal effect upon our tempers and conduct, and thereby lead us to certain ruin.

New afflictions, and every thing that is disagreeable and calamitous, are things that are naturally capable of leading to virtue or to vice, and consequentially of yielding us happiness or misery. They improve our tempers and promote our happiness, if they make us resigned to the will of God,

God, because they then wean our minds from the pursuit of a species of happiness which is not capable of yielding us any real satisfaction, and they direct our views to God, and such objects as will not finally disappoint us. Considering them in this light, they are kind admonitions to shun what though flattering, is, nevertheless, hurtful to us. We have, therefore, reason to receive them with gratitude, as things exceedingly salutary, for though, for the present they be not joyous, but grievous, as the apostle says, they work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, but no otherwise can afflictions be of any use to us.

On the contrary, it is plain, that if afflictions have any other effect than such as I have now described, they must be exceedingly hurtful to us. If they feed discontent, they introduce a state of the most complete wretchedness that can invade the mind of man. Every emotion of discontent adds to the growth of worldly mindedness, and makes a man more a slave to his irregular appetites and passions. Thus by indulging discontent, we frustrate the kind intentions of providence in our afflictions.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, resignation to the will of God is a temper of mind peculiarly pleasing to him, as we may learn both from the nature of the thing itself, and the most express declarations of scripture. That God must be peculiarly pleased with this temper of mind is evident from the nature of it. Whence arises dissatisfaction with our condition in life? Can we indulge this temper without entertaining a suspicion that the course of things has taken some wrong turn, and that the Divine Being has not been sufficiently attentive to us and our concerns. This disposition of mind is, in effect, an arranging of providence, and arises from what may be properly called impiety. It is a calling in question the wisdom and goodness of God, the most important of all his attributes, those which make him the proper object of our reverence, love and confidence; and can any thing be more justly displeasing to him than this?

On the contrary, a contented temper of mind does honour to God. It gives glory to God by believing him to be what he is, and being fully impressed with that belief. Resignation is the language of a heart that is fully persuaded that God is a Being infinitely wise, powerful and good, and who gives an unremitted attention to all the

works of his hands. This is giving God the glory due to his name, and habitually offering up to him the sacrifice of a meek and quiet spirit which in his sight is of great price. Such a person behaves like a creature in his situation, imperfect and fallible, under the government of a God who cannot mistake concerning him. He does not start out of his proper sphere, nor question God foolishly.

Lastly, we do not want the express testimony of scripture, that this temper of mind is peculiarly pleasing to God. How does the Divine Being boast, as it were, of the character of Job, who bore his severe trials so remarkably well when he tells his friends that he had spoken of him the things that were right, whereas they had not; referring to that most remarkable speech of his, when he was seemingly stripped of all the enjoyments of life, The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, and blessed be the name of the Lord; and also, after receiving positive bodily sufferings, in addition to these losses, shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not receive evil also.

Do we then believe that it is not in our power to alter the general course of things established by providence, that the affairs of the world are already

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in the best hands, so that we have no reason to wish for any other disposition of things, and that we ourselves should be losers by indulging a fretful and discontented temper, as we should thereby deprive ourselves of the particular benefit intended us by our afflictions; and do we moreover believe that a temper of habitual resignation is peculiarly pleasing in the sight of God, and are we not desirous to cultivate it, and ready, under the prevailing influence of it, to say upon all occasions, Not our will, but thy will, O our God, and heavenly father, be done. Let us, from a full and unshaken conviction of the wisdom and goodness of the soverign disposer of all things, say, whatever calamity befal us, with Eli in my text, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. Let us bless the Lord at all times, in sickness as well as in health, in adversity as well as prosperity, and let his praise be continually in our mouths. Let us rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the holy Ghost which is given to us.

ON

BEING PERFECT

AS

GOD IS PERFECT.

Be ye therefore perfect even as your father who is in Heaven is perfect. MATT. V. 48.

IN this excellent discourse, delivered at the very entrance of our Lord on his public ministry, he professedly corrects the innovations which the Scribes and Pharisees had been long making in the law of God. Indeed, the antient religion of the Hebrew nation had suffered greatly by this means. The genuine moral precepts of it had been relaxed, and its obligation had been weakened and evaded, on the most frivolous pretences: such as equally reflected on their understanding and their virtue. The zeal of religionists was spent on the externals of religion, while they had very little concern for the vital, and only valuable parts of it.

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It was, therefore, our Lord's first business to restore religion to its antient and proper standard, by exposing the absurd comments by which the Scribes and Pharisees had so shockingly perverted the law of God, and to explain in their full extent its moral precepts, from which the attention of the people had been long diverted.

Consequently, we are not to expect in this discourse any precepts, or maxims of morality, properly *new*, such as mankind had never known before; but to see the moral precepts of the law restored to their primitive purity, and original extent. He expressly declared, that he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. He made no innovations in the law itself. His sublime precept concerning *loving our enemies*, has no reference to any thing defective in the laws of Moses on that head. For that which he says was *said by them of old time, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy*, is no where to be found in the law. On the contrary, the writings of Moses inculcate the most extensive benevolence, admonishing us not only of the relation in which we stand to all the human race, but even to brute creatures; compassion and tenderness to which he strongly recommends.

That most sublime precept contained in my text, *Be ye perfect even as your father who is in Heaven is perfect*, was not new, nor is it peculiar to the gospel; for, *Be ye holy as I am holy*, is expressly quoted by the apostle Peter, 1 Pet. I. 6. from the Old Testament, in which it is one of the precepts which God gave to the Israelites by Moses. Lev. XX. 7. But though all the persons to whom Jesus was addressing himself might have found, and many of them had no doubt frequently read it in their scriptures, there was good reason for his repeating it, and laying the stress that he does upon it, when it had been generally overlooked, or explained away, together with other precepts equally excellent, by the established expounders of the law.

The importance of this precept will be evident if we duly consider the nature of it, and the reason why we may suppose it was recommended to our attention. This, therefore, I propose to do in this discourse, and then make a short application.

First. I propose to explain the nature and extent of this precept, in which we are directed to be perfect as our father who is in Heaven is perfect.

That this precept was not intended to be understood by us in the strictest sense of the words, viz. that

that our hearts should be as pure, and our conduct as unblameable, as those of our infinitely holy God, requires no proof. The allowance that we are but too ready to makes for ourselves is alone sufficient to prevent our putting so rigorous a construction on the words of our Lord. In this case our prejudices themselves, which so often mislead us, will guard us against any mistake of the sense of scripture.

God, who made us, and who knows our frame, well knows that we are not capable of living perfectly sinless lives. Unsteady and fluctuating as our minds are, our thoughts will be running after improper objects, and in a greater or less degree will draw our affections after them; and thus we, in a manner, unavoidably contract guilt. The world, moreover, abounds with temptations to vice; and as we cannot avoid being exposed to them, and they flatter our appetites and passions, they can hardly fail to excite improper desires at least, though it may not proceed to the actual commission of any crime. But, certainly, we cannot indulge sinful thoughts, or cherish the least desire of any thing that is forbidden, without violating the purity of our minds, and deviating from perfect innocence.

This would be the case were we ever so circumspect, attentive to all our thoughts, words, and actions, and though we should do all this without any intermission. But this extreme circumspection is, in fact, impossible, and what the usual state of our minds and thoughts will not admit of. Besides, who is as circumspect as he might be. Alas, farther than this, in many things we all offend, without excepting the very best of men, those who come the nearest to the perfection of human nature.

We likewise learn from the scriptures, as well as from observation and experience, that perfection is not to be expected of man. *What man is there that doeth good, and sinneth not.* Ecc. VII. 20. With this limitation we are no doubt to understand the general characters that are given of good men in the scriptures, though no particular faults be recorded of them, as of Abraham, who is called *the friend of God*, David, who is said to have been *a man after God's own heart*; Job, who is called *a perfect and upright man*; Zachariah, and Elizabeth, who are said to have *walked in all the ordinances of God blameless*; Nathaniel, who is called by our Saviour *a man without guile*. And when he himself, who is said to have been *without sin*,

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was saluted with the appellation of *good*, he disclaimed it; saying, there was none good, meaning perfectly good, but one that is God; before whom, in order to give us the highest idea of the purity of his nature, it is said that even the Heavens are not clean, and that he charges his angels with folly. Job. IV. 18.

On many accounts, therefore, we may be satisfied that absolute sinless perfection was never expected, and could not have been required of us. God is not so unreasonable a master as to demand of us more than he knows we are able to perform. On the contrary, he is ever ready to make every possible allowance for the frailties and infirmities of our nature; and nothing but what is purposely and habitually indulged can render us obnoxious to his displeasure.

The proper meaning and intent, therefore, of this precept must be this, that we ought to set no bounds whatever to our virtuous attainments; fixing to ourselves no standard of excellence, short of that of the Divine Being himself. Leaving every thing that is behind, we should, with the apostle, be ever pressing on to what is before us, (Phil. III. 13.) to something that we have not yet attained. Whatever progress we have made in virtue,

virtue, it should be our care to be continually adding to it; and without ever imagining that we have wisdom or virtue enough already, we should endeavour to grow wiser and better, so as to improve our natures, and consequently our capacity for happiness, to the utmost.

To this end it will be of great use to us to propose to ourselves as perfect a *model* as possible, to which we may compare ourselves from time to time, in order to form a judgment of the improvements we make. This model we should frequently contemplate, as a rule to walk by, or a pattern to copy after, without thinking ourselves absolutely obliged to attain the same perfection. It is, therefore, rather useful as a *rule*, than obligatory as a *command*.

Now, what could be more properly recommended for this purpose than the imitation of the Divine Being; to all intelligent and moral agents; he being the most perfect of this class. For in these respects, viz. in intelligence and a capacity for moral conduct, we are formed in the image of God. God alone is, in these respects, absolutely perfect. In the imitation of him, therefore, we are in no danger of being misled, so as to copy after any error, or defect, instead of what

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is excellent. But this I shall enlarge upon under the next head of my discourse, which was,

Secondly, to consider the reasons why the imitation of perfect goodness is thus recommended to us, rather than such degrees of it as are attainable by us. On the first view of the subject, it would seem more reasonable, and advisable, to endeavour to imitate only what was within the reach of our capacity; and that to aim at any thing confessedly above our reach, would only tend to discourage us, and consequently hinder our proficiency. But if we consider the nature of man, to whom this precept is given, we shall see it in another light; For

1st. Had any thing less than absolute perfection been proposed to us, such is the vanity and self conceit to which men are subject, that many would easily have imagined they had already attained to it; and thus a stop would be put to their further improvement. We see every day how apt men are to think too well of themselves. They overlook what is most faulty, what gives them pain to look upon, but dwell upon what is good, and praise worthy, in their dispositions and actions. By this means it comes to pass that their virtues, by being often contemplated, are magnified

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in their apprehensions; and their vices, being overlooked, are lost sight of and forgotten, and then it is no wonder that the judgment they form of themselves is not just, or according to truth, but greatly too much in their favour; so that they often cry *peace, peace* to themselves, when there is no peace.

This is the same principle in human nature that leads men to detract from the merit of others. To think other persons better than themselves is a sensible mortification to them. In order therefore, to bring them to, and, if possible, below, their own level, they aggravate their faults, and put some unfavourable construction on their best actions. And when men find their account in entertaining any particular opinion concerning themselves, or others, from having a previous disposition towards entertaining it, they generally succeed. It is not so very difficult or uncommon a thing for a man to impose upon himself.

From this it is easy to infer, that were the regards of men to be fixed on any imperfect being like themselves, though ever so excellent, and it were required of them to be as wise and good, but not wiser or better, such a rule would, through their natural self-conceit, be hurtful to them; as,

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on some pretence or other, they might imagine they were already as good as they were required to be, at the same time that their very self-conceit would argue them to be destitute of the most essential of all virtues, and the foundation of almost every other, viz. *humility*, and a diffidence of a man's self. For where there is this humility, or a disposition to undervalue rather than to overvalue their attainments, there will be a desire, and an endeavor, to improve; whereas pride and self-conceit preclude all farther proficiency in any thing.

Wisely, therefore, has it been the object of the divine care to leave no room, no pretence whatever, for this corrupt leaven to insinuate itself into the hearts of men, by giving us a pattern of virtue and goodness which no man, in the sober use of his senses, can ever imagine he can fully come up to; a standard, by which if he rightly measure himself and his attainments, he must ever be sensible of great defects; to remove which will be a constant motive with him to exert himself to the utmost, to employ all the force of his faculties, to leave nothing untried, that can be of any use to improve his disposition, and reform his conduct; that he may produce in both a nearer likeness than he has yet attained to of the all-perfect nature, and

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the righteous conduct, of the Divine Being, who is *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Ps. XIV. 17.

While we consider what is proposed to us only as a pattern to copy after, it cannot be too perfect; because the more perfect it is, the surer guide it is for us to follow, and the less danger there is of our being misled by it. We are discouraged only when we consider ourselves as obliged, under some pains and penalty, to come perfectly up to our pattern. To consider the character and conduct of the Divine Being in this light might justly discourage us in our endeavours to imitate it. The idea of such an obligation must cut off all hope of success; and where there is no room for hope, there is no motive to endeavour. In this situation men could not be expected to become wiser or better.

But this is not our case. Our heavenly Father has been pleased to recommend himself and his conduct to us as a pattern for our imitation, that by the contemplation of the perfections of his nature, we might form to ourselves the justest ideas of true excellence, and thereby know how to direct our endeavours after it; but at the same time, knowing our frame, he is not so unreasonable

ble as to expect we should ever, in any state, and much less in this, perfectly come up to it. The imitation of the Divine Being, therefore, as it is recommended to us in the Gospel, is a noble advantage to us in a course of virtue, and no discouragement or hindrance whatever.

This, moreover, is an advantage peculiar to our holy religion, and therefore what we ought to value ourselves upon, and by no means neglect to avail ourselves of. With what colour could the heathens preach, and philosophers recommend the examples of the gods that they worshipped to the imitation of their worshippers, many of whom (all that were not inanimate parts of nature as the sun, moon, and stars, &c.) had been men like themselves, and some of them vicious in proportion to their power. They, therefore, wisely declined insisting upon this topic. Whatever they say to recommend a life of sobriety and virtue, they never mention the example of their gods.

But in a christian country there is no reason why any teacher of virtue should be silent on this head since there is nothing in the character or conduct of the God that we worship that we need be ashamed to mention, and expose to the view of

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mankind. So uniformly great and excellent is his character and conduct, that there is no view we can take of them but what tends to inspire our hearts with an abhorrence of vice, and the love of virtue and goodness. To enlarge on this subject is needless. None of us I trust are so unacquainted with God, as not to know that he is essentially righteous and holy, and that a righteous Lord must love righteousness, and hate iniquity. For what we esteem and practice ourselves we love in others.

There is no one vice that men are addicted to, but a reflection on the nature and conduct of the Divine Being must fill us with shame and confusion for it. Has selfishness an ascendancy over us? Do our views and actions center too much in ourselves, and do we not enter with proper warmth into the interests of others? What must we think of ourselves, and of this narrow disposition, when we reflect on the universal disinterested ease and bounty of the Divine Being, all whose purposes and works have for their object the happiness of others, viz. that of the various creatures that he has made, who is so far from confining his goodness to himself, or those whom we may call his friends, that even his enemies partake of it;

lt; for he is good to the unthankful and the unworthy?

Are we prone to envy, jealousy, malice, and revenge, how doubly odious must such a disposition appear when compared with the mercy and compassion of the Divine Being, who, though all power be in his hands, has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but is desirous that all should repent and live. And must not all pride, vanity, and self-conceit, be for ever struck dumb before an infinitely great, and yet an infinitely condescending God; who for our sakes has condescended to appear in the familiar character of our father and our friend, chusing to vail his glory, rather than forbid, or discourage, our access to him, and intercourse with him, when it was necessary to our happiness?

If a man be addicted to excessive animal gratifications, how must the sense of his obligation to become like the Divine Being, to be perfect as his father in Heaven is perfect, fill him with shame and self reproach; when he must perceive that by such low indulgences he is so far from raising and improving his nature, and bringing himself nearer to the all-perfect nature of God, he is divesting himself of the prerogatives of a rational nature; being go-

verned by mere appetite and passion, and sinking as far as his nature will permit him to the condition of a brute beast?

Besides, we who have the benefit of divine revelation have advantages for the imitation of God of which the wisest heathens were destitute. Did we know nothing of God, but what the light of nature teaches, we might be at a loss what to do when we were directed to imitate him. We may, indeed, be said, in a figurative sense, to trace the footsteps, and to hear the voice, of God in his works; but it is in a very obscure and indistinct manner. But in revelation the Divine Being may be said to assume a proper *personal character*, and to act a proper part, as intelligible to us as that of the prophets, kings, and private persons, with which it is intermixed. We see in what manner God spake, and how he acted; from which we may infer what he thought and felt on a variety of particular occasions, and this at intervals in a long succession, from the time of our first parents to that of Christ and the apostles; so that we can no more be at any loss to know what to do when we are directed to imitate God, than if we had been ordered to imitate any person whatever.

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In some cases, indeed, the infinite superiority of the Divine Being to all his creatures must make a different rule of conduct necessary. He, for instance, is continually promoting *good* by means of *evil;* and there are many instances in the history of his dispensations to mankind of great calamity, and heavy judgments, inflicted upon families and nations, in which persons of all characters are involved, for the sake of promoting a great general and lasting good. This we must not attempt, because our understandings are finite; so that what we imagine to be good may eventually prove to be evil; whereas his knowledge is infinite. He sees the end of every thing from the beginning, and is also able to make abundant recompence to every individual who may seem to be improperly sufferers in cases of general calamity.

We see then the admirable propriety and use of this precept of our Lord, to endeavour to be perfect as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect. Be it our care, therefore, convinced of its importance, to make the proper use of it, by reducing it to practice.

For a man to entertain the idea of being like to God, and especially of being in any sense, perfect as he is perfect, is certainly a great and noble,

but a just and proper aim. For, weak as man is, we ought not hastily and rashly to conclude that it is not in our power to attain to great and distinguished excellence; and that because we cannot attain to absolute perfection, we may not make considerable approaches to it. The extent of this human capacity for knowledge or virtue is unknown to ourselves; and it is for the honour of our maker to suppose it to be very great, and to act upon that supposition. Not more than a century ago it was not imagined that the understanding of man could have attained the *knowledge* of which we are now possessed, especially of the works and laws of nature; and, to appearance, man is much better formed for moral action than for abstruse speculation; good practice being easy to all that sincerely endeavour to live well, whereas the investigation of truth is difficult to the most intelligent of our species.

It is, no doubt, with a view to our imitation of God, that we are so particularly informed of our near relation to him, as his *offspring*, and his *children*; and that man was originally made in the image of God; and though by vice and folly we have in a great measure effaced this image, we are still invited in the gospel to become again *partak-*

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ers of a divine nature, 2 Pet. I. 4. and this is represented as the great object and end of the gospel. The apostle Paul expressly exhorts christians to be *followers of God, as his dear*, or favoured, *children*, Eph. V. 1. distinguished by peculiar privileges and advantages for purity and greatness of conduct, like that of their heavenly father.

Let us, then, at the same time endeavour to do honour to our maker, and to ourselves, by setting no bounds to our attainment in virtue; and therefore let us not think of comparing ourselves to men like ourselves, subject to the same imperfections, but propose to ourselves the imitation of the Divine Being himself, endeavouring to be holy as he is holy, righteous as he is righteous, and perfect, in our sphere and rank, in the scale of being, as he is perfect in his.

ON

ON HABITUAL DEVOTION.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. Ps. X. 4.

GOD, my christian brethren, is a being with whom we all of us have to do, and the relation we stand in to him is the most important of all our relations. Our connexions with other beings, and other things, are slight, and transient, in comparison with this. God is our *maker*, our constant *preserver* and *benefactor*, our moral *governor*, and our final *judge*. He is present with us wherever we are; the secrets of all hearts are constantly known to him, and *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. Here, then, is a situation, in which we find ourselves, that demands our closest attention. The consideration is, in the highest degree, interesting and alarming: knowing how absolutely dependent we are upon God, that *in him we live and*

and move and have our being; and knowing also, that by vice and folly we have rendered ourselves justly obnoxious to his displeasure.

Now, to think, and to act, in a manner corresponding to this our necessary intercourse with God, certainly requires that we keep up an habitual regard to it: and a total, or very great degree of inattention to it, must be highly criminal and dangerous. Accordingly, we find in the scriptures, that it is characteristic of a good man, that *he sets the Lord always before him*, and that *he acknowledges God in all his ways.* Whereas it is said of the wicked, in my text, that *God is not in all their thoughts;* and elsewhere, that *the fear of God is not before their eyes*, that *they put the thoughts of God far from them, and will not the knowledge of the Most High.*

This circumstance seems to furnish a pretty good test of the state of a man's mind with respect to virtue and vice. The most abandoned and profligate of mankind are those who live *without God in the world*, entirely thoughtless of his Being, perfections, and providence; having their hearts wholly engrossed with this world and the things of it: by which means those passions which terminate in the enjoyment of them are inflamed to such a

degree, that no other principle can restrain their indulgence. These persons may be called *practical atheists*; and the temper of mind they have acquired often leads them to deny both natural and revealed religion. They secretly wish, indeed they cannot but wish, there may be no truth in those principles, the apprehension of which is apt to give them disturbance; and hence they give little attention to the evidence that is produced for them, and magnify all the objections they have made to them. And it is well known, that, in a mind so strongly biassed, the most cogent reasons often amount to nothing, while the most trifling cavils pass for demonstration. It is the same with respect to any other speculation, when the mind has got a *bias* in favour of any particular conclusion.

On the other hand, a truly and perfectly good man loves, and therefore cherishes, the thought of God, his father and his friend; until every production of divine power and skill, every instance of divine bounty, and every event of divine providence, never fails to suggest to his mind the idea of the great Author of all things, *the giver of every good and every perfect gift*, and the sovereign disposer of all affairs and all events. Thus he lives,

lives, as it were, constantly *seeing him, who is invisible.* He sees God in every thing, and he sees every thing in God. He *dwells in love*, and thereby *dwells in God, and God in him.* And so long as he considers himself as living in the world which God has made, and partaking of the bounty with which his providence supplies him; so long as he is intent upon discharging his duty, in the situation in which, he believes, the Divine Being has placed him, and meets with no greater trials and difficulties than, he is persuaded, his God and father has appointed for his good, it is almost impossible that the thought of God should ever be long absent from his mind. Every thing he sees or feels will make it recur again and again perpetually. His whole life will be, as it were, one act of devotion; and this state of mind, being highly pleasurable, and his satisfaction having infinite sources, will be daily encreasing, so as to grow more equable, and more intense to all eternity; when it will be *joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*

These are the two extremes of the sentiments and conduct of men with respect to God, and all the varieties of the human characters will be found somewhere between them; so that we may be deemed virtuous or vicious, in proportion as we approach to the one or the other.

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The more imperfect of the middle classes of mankind will have their minds too much engrossed by this world and the things of it, so as to exclude, in a very great degree, the apprehension of God, and of their relation to him. Provided, however, that they have had a religious education, these thoughts cannot be prevented from recurring from time to time, and producing stronger or weaker resolutions of repentance and amendment; but not having their full influence, and therefore, serving rather to disquiet the mind, conscious of a want of perfect integrity, they will be apt to be overborne by the superior power of things seen and temporal; and the minds of such persons being in this fluctuating condition, whatever success they may have in the world, their lives will contain a great mixture of anxiety and remorse.

But those whom we may stile the more perfect of the middle classes of men, though, like the former, their minds may be, now and then, carried away by the magic influences of this world; and though they may give too far, and too eagerly, into the pursuit of its pleasures, riches, and honours, they will never wholly, or for a long time, lose sight of God, and of their duty; and pious sentiments, recurring with superior force at intervals,

will

will produce a kind of *religious fervour*, which, rousing the mind to a greater exertion of its powers, will produce good resolutions with considerable strength and vigour; and thereby break their growing attachment to the world. These fervours, however, will of course remit, and other objects will necessarily resume some part, at least, of their influence: but if a sense of God and of religion have once taken firm hold of the mind, in the early part of life, there will be reason to hope, that an express regard to them will return with greater force, and after shorter intervals, perpetually. By this means such strength will be given to the principle of conscience, that in the farthest excursions they make from the strict path of religion, even while they maintain no express regard to God in their actions, the bare apprehension of a thing being *right*, and their *duty*, will, in all considerable instances, immediately and mechanically determine their minds; so that they will never deliberately do any thing which they are convinced is unlawful, and offensive to God. At most, if ever a stronger temptation than usual should induce them to transgress their known duty, in any of the greater instances of it, the state of their minds will be such, as that these transgressions will be followed by the keenest

keenest compunction and contrition, which will make them less liable to commit the same offence a second time.

Thus we see that those persons, in whose minds there is this prevailing disposition to virtue, will be improved both by the uniform practice of their duty, which necessarily strengthens the *habit* of it, and even by occasional transgressions, which gives a stronger *stimulus* to the power of conscience. But there is great danger, lest these violations of known duty be either so great as to produce despair, which naturally hardens the mind, or so frequent as to beget a habit. Both these weaken the power of conscience. The man then goes backward in religion, and may at last, even from this more advanced state of virtue, be brought to *commit all iniquity with greediness*. Let *him*, then, *who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*; and let all of us, conscious of the frailty of our natures, be intent upon *working out our salvation with fear and trembling*.

An *habitual regard to God* being the most effectual means of advancing us from the more imperfect to the more perfect state I have been describing, I shall endeavour to recommend this leading duty to you, by a fuller and more distinct enumeration

ration of its happy effects; and I shall then shew what I apprehend to be the most effectual methods of promoting it, and of removing the various obstructions to it.

1. An habitual regard to God in our actions tends greatly to keep us firm in our adherence to our duty. It has pleased divine providence to place men in a state of trial and probation. This world is strictly such. We are surrounded with a great variety of objects, adapted to gratify a variety of senses, with which we are furnished. The pleasures they give us are all innocent in moderation, and they engage us in a variety of agreeable and proper pursuits. But our natures are such, as that the frequent indulgence of any of our appetites tends to make its demands inordinate, and to beget an habitual propensity to indulge it; and this proneness to the excessive indulgence of any of our passions enslaves our minds, and is highly dangerous, and criminal. By this means we too often come to forget God our maker, to injure our fellow-creatures of mankind, and to do a still greater, and more irreparable injury to ourselves, both in mind and body.

It has pleased Almighty God, therefore, from the concern he had for our good, to forbid these immoderate

moderate indulgences of the love of pleasure, riches, and honour, by express *laws*, guarded with the most awful sanctions. Now we are certainly less liable to forget these laws, and our obligation to observe them, when we keep up an habitual regard to our great lawgiver and judge; when we consider him as always *present with us;* when we consider that *his eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good*; that he *sees in secret*, and will one day *reward openly*. In this manner we shall acquire an habitual reverence for God and his laws, which will end in an habitual obedience to them, even without any express regard to their authority. Thus we should certainly be less likely to neglect the request of a friend, or the injunction of a master, if we could always keep in mind the remembrance of our friend, or master; and a constant attention to them would certainly give us a habit of pleasing them in all things.

2. An habitual regard to God promotes an uniform chearfulness of mind; it tends to dissipate anxiety, or melancholy, and may even, in some cases, prevent madness. Without a regard to God, as the maker and governor of all things, this world affords but a gloomy and uncomfortable prospect. Without this, we see no great *end* for which

which we have to live, we have no great or animating *object* to pursue; and whatever schemes we may be carrying on, our views are bounded by a very short and narrow space. To an atheist, therefore, every thing must appear little, dark, and confused. And let it be considered, that, in proportion as we forget God, and lose our regard to him, we adopt the sentiments and views of atheists, and shut our eyes to the bright and glorious prospects which religion exhibits to us.

Religion, my brethren, the doctrine of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, opens an immense, a glorious, and most transporting prospect; and every man, who is humbly conscious that he conforms to the will of his maker, may enjoy, and rejoice in this prospect. Considering ourselves as the subjects of the moral government of God, we see a most important sphere of action in which we have to exert ourselves, we have the greatest of all objects set before us, *glory, honour, and immortality; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, as the reward of our faithful *perseverance in well-doing*; and we have a boundless existence, an eternity, in which to pursue and enjoy this reward.

These great views and objects, the contemplation

tion of which must be habitual to the mind which keeps up an habitual regard to God, cannot fail to diminish the lustre of *the things of time and sense*, which engage our attention here below; and while they lessen our solicitude and anxiety about them, they must cure that fretfulness, and distress of mind, which is occasioned by the disappointments we meet with in them.

For the same reason, this habitual regard to God, this life of devotion, which I would recommend, must tend in some measure to prevent that most deplorable of all the calamities mankind are subject to, I mean *madness*. It is well known, that the circumstance which generally first occasions, or at least greatly contributes to, this disorder, is too close, and too anxious an attention to some *single thing*, in which a person is greatly interested; so that, for a long time, he can hardly think of any thing else, and particularly is often prevented from *sleeping*, by means of it. Thus we frequently see, that when persons are of a sanguine temper of mind, a severe disappointment of any kind will end in madness. Also a sudden transport of *joy*, from unexpected success, will sometimes have the same effect. But, from the nature of the thing, this violence of either kind, could hardly take place in a truly

a truly devout and pious mind, in the mind of a man who considers all the events, in which he can be concerned, as appointed by a God infinitely wise and good; who, he is persuaded, hath, in the most afflictive providences, the most gracious intention to him, and to all mankind; and who, by the most prosperous events, means to try his virtue, and to put him upon the most difficult of all exercises, that of behaving properly in such circumstances. To a mind rightly disposed, and duly seasoned with a sense of religion, nothing here below will appear to be of sufficient moment to produce these dreadful effects. *We shall rejoice, as though we rejoiced not; and weep, as though we wept not; knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Deep melancholy is often occasioned, in persons of a lower tone of spirits, by the same kind of disappointments which produce raging madness in others. It is the effect of *despair*, and could never take place, but when a person apprehended, that that which we may call his *all*, that in which he put his chief trust and confidence, had failed him, and he had no other resource to fly to. But a truly religious man can never despair; because, let what will befal him here below, he knows his chief hap-

piness is safe, being lodged where *neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal. In patience, therefore, he will be* able at all times to *possess his own soul*, exercising a steady trust and confidence in God, *the rock of ages, the sure resting-place of all generations.*

Melancholy, or despondence in a lower degree, what we commonly call *lowness of spirits*, generally arises from a want of some object of pursuit, sufficient to engage the attention, and rouse a man to the proper exertion of his powers. In this situation, he has nothing to do but to think of himself, and his own feelings, which never fails to involve him in endless anxiety and distress. But a principle of religion will ever put a man upon a variety of active and vigorous pursuits. No truly pious and good man can be an idle man. He will fully employ all his power of doing good; he will not keep his *talent hid in a napkin;* and, far from complaining that time hangs heavy on his hands, he will rather complain, that he has not time enough for the execution of half his benevolent purposes.

3. An habitual regard to God fits a man for the business of this life, giving a peculiar presence and intrepidity of mind; and it is, therefore, the best support in difficult enterprizes of any kind.

A man

A man who keeps up an habitual regard to God, who *acknowledges him in all his ways*, and lives a life of devotion to him, has a kind of *union with God*; feeling, in some measure, the same sentiments, and having the same views. Hence, being, in the language of the apostle, *a worker together with God*, and therefore being confident that God is with him, and for him, *he will not fear what man can do unto him.* Moreover, fearing God, and having confidence in him, he is a stranger to every other fear. Being satisfied that God will work all his pleasure in him, by him, and for him, he is free from alarm and perturbation, and is not easily disconcerted, so as to lose the possession of his own mind. And having this presence of mind, being conscious of the integrity of his own heart, confiding in the favour of his maker, and therefore sensible that there is nothing of much real value that he can lose, he will have leisure to consider every situation in which he finds himself, and be able to act with calmness and prudence, as circumstances may require.

Is there, then, any active and difficult service, to which we are summoned by the voice of our country, of mankind, and of God, these are the men, I mean men of religion and devotion, in whom we

can most confide? Other men may be roused by their passions to any pitch of patriotic enthusiasm. They may oppose the insidious attempts of corrupt ministers or tyrants to enslave their country, or may bravely face a foreign enemy in the field, though they risk their fortunes, and their lives in the contest. But mere wordly-minded men, staking their *all* in such enterprizes as these, and having little more than a sense of *honour* to support them, may, in some critical moment, be sensible of the value of what they risk, and on that principle prove cowards.

Whereas the man of religion feels the same indignation against all iniquitous attempts to enslave himself and his country, and if he have the same native ardour of mind, he will be roused to act with the same vigour against a tyrant, or an invader; but running no risk of what is of most consequence to him, he will not be so liable to be intimidated: he will be more master of himself, have greater presence of mind, and act with greater prudence in time of danger. If he die in the glorious struggle, he dies, not with the gloomy ferocity of the man of this world, but with the triumph of a christian, in a consciousness of having finished his career of virtue in the most glorious manner in

which

which he could possibly finish it, in the service of his country, and of mankind.

Having thus considered the important *effects* of an habitual regard to God in all our ways, I come to treat of the most proper and effectual methods of promoting this temper of mind.

1. If you be really desirous to cultivate this habitual devotion, endeavour, in the first place, to divest your minds of too great a multiplicity of the cares of this world. The man who lives to God, in the manner in which I have been endeavouring to describe, lives to him principally, and loves and confides in him above all. To be solicitous about this world, therefore, as if our chief happiness consisted in it, must be incompatible with this devotion. *We cannot serve God and Mammon.* If we be *christians*, we should consider, that the great, and professed object of our religion, is the revelation of a future life, of unspeakably more importance to us than this transitory world, and the perishable things of it. As christians, we should consider ourselves as *citizens of Heaven*, and only *strangers and pilgrims here below.* We must, therefore, see, that, as christians, there is certainly required of us a considerable degree of indifference about this world, which

was only intended to serve us as a passage to a better.

The Divine Being himself has made wise provision for lessening the cares of this world, by the appointment of one day in seven, for the purpose of rest and avocation from labour. Let us then, at least, take the advantage which this day gives us, of *calling off our eyes from beholding vanity*, and of *quickening ourselves in the ways of God.*

This advice I would particularly recommend to those persons who are engaged in *arts*, *manufactures* and *commerce*. For, highly beneficial as these things are in a political view, and subservient to the elegant enjoyment of life, they seem not to be so favourable to religion and devotion, as the business of *agriculture*; and for this reason, therefore, probably, among others, the Divine Being forbad commerce to the people of the jews, and gave them such laws as are chiefly adapted to a life of husbandry. The husbandman is in a situation peculiarly favourable to the contemplation of the works of God, and to a sense of his dependence upon him. The rain from heaven, and various circumstances relating to the weather, &c. on which the goodness of his crops depends, he receives as from the hand of God, and is hardly sensible of any secondary,

dary, or more immediate cause. If he understand any thing of the principles of vegetation, and can account for a few obvious appearances upon what we call *the laws of nature*; these laws he knows to be the express appointment of God; and he cannot help perceiving the wisdom and goodness of God in the appointment; so that the objects about which he is daily conversant are, in their nature, a lesson of gratitude and praise.

Besides, the emploment of the husbandman being, chiefly, to *bring food out of the earth*, his attention is more confined to the real wents, or at most the principal conveniences of life; and his mind is not, like that of the curious artist and manufacturer, so liable to be fascinated by the taste for superfluities, and the fictitious wants of men.

Nor, lastly, does the business of husbandry so wholly engross a man's thoughts and attention, while he is employed about it, as many of the arts and manufactures, and as commerce necessarily does. And it should be a general rule with us, that the more *attention of mind* our employment in life requires, the more careful should we be to draw our thoughts from it, on the *day of rest*, and at other intervals of time set apart for devotional purposes. Otherwise, a worldly-minded temper,

not being checked or controuled by any thing of a contrary tendency, will necessarily get possession of our hearts.

2. This brings me to the second advice, which is by no means to omit stated times of worshipping God by prayer, public and private. Every passion and affection in our frame is strengthened by the proper and natural expression of it. Thus frequent intercourse and conversation with those we love promotes friendship, and so also the intercourse we keep up with God by prayer, in which we express our reverence and love of him, and our confidence in him, promotes a spirit of devotion, and makes it easier for the ideas of the Divine Being, and his providence to occur to the mind on other occasions, when we are not formally praying to him. Besides, if persons whose thoughts are much employed in the business of this life had no time to set apart for the exercise of devotion, they would be in danger of neglecting it entirely; at least, to a degree that would be attended with a great diminution of their virtue and happiness.

But, in order that the exercises of devotion may be the most efficacious to promote the true spirit, and general habit of it, it is adviseable, that *prayers* properly so called, that is, direct addresses to the

Divine

Divine Being, be short. The strong feeling of reverence, love, and confidence, which ought to animate our devotions, cannot be kept up in such minds as ours through a prayer of considerable length; and a tedious languor in prayer is of great disservice to the life of religion, as it accustoms the mind to think of God with indifference; whereas, it is of the utmost consequence, that the Divine Being always appear to us an object of the greatest importance, and engage the whole attention of our souls. Except, therefore, in public, where prayers of a greater length are, in a manner, necessary, and where the presence and concurrence of our fellow-worshippers assist to keep up the fervour of our common devotion, it seems more adviseable, that devotional exercises have intervals of meditation, calculated to impress our minds more deeply with the sentiments we express; and that they be used without any strict regard to particular times, places, or posture of body.

This method of conducting devotional exercises, which makes them consist chiefly of meditation upon God and his providence, has in many cases several advantages over a direct address to God, which should peculiarly recommend it to

those

those who are desirous to cultivate the genuine spirit of devotion. Among other advantages, and that not the least, in meditation the mind is not so apt to acquiesce in the mere *work done* (what the schoolmen call the *opus operatum*) as it is in formal prayer, especially when it is made of considerable length. So prone, alas! is the mind of man to superstition, that hardly any thing can be prescribed to us, as a *means* of virtue, but we immediately acquiesce in it as an *end;* and not only so, but the consequence of a punctilious observance of prayer, and other means of religion, is too often made the foundation of a spiritual pride, and self-sufficiency, which is of a most alarming nature; being directly opposite to that deep humility and self-abasement, which is ever the predominant disposition of a mind truly devout. The sentiment corresponding to the language *stand by thyself, I am holier than thou,* is not, I am afraid, peculiar to the pharisaical jew, or the romish devotee. It infects many protestant religionists, being generated by similar causes. Rather than be liable to this, it is certainly better, far better, even to be less regular in our exercises of devotion. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.*

3. In

3. In the course of your usual employment omit no proper opportunity of turning your thoughts towards God. Habitually regard him as the *ultimate cause*, and *proper author* of every thing you see, and the disposer of all events that respect yourselves or others. This will not fail to make the idea of God occur familiarly to your mind, and influence your whole conduct.

It is to be regretted, that the taste and custom of this country is such, that a person of a devotional turn of mind cannot indulge himself in the natural expression of it, even upon the most proper and just occasions, without exposing himself to the particular notice, if not the ridicule, of the generality of those who may be present; whereas could we decently, and seriously express our gratitude to God, upon every agreeable occurrence, and our resignation and submission to his will upon every calamitous event of life, it would tend greatly to strengthen the habit of *acknowledging God in all our ways*, and promote the spirit of devotion.

In no other country, I believe, whatever, neither among the roman-catholics, nor mahometans, have people, even the most fashionable and polite, any idea of being ashamed of their religion. On the contrary, they are rather ostentatious of it, and there-

therefore they seem to have more than they are really possessed of; and this is the case with some, both of the established church, and among the dissenters in England. But, unfortunately, this outward shew of religion was carried to such a length, about a century ago, in this country, and was sometimes made to subserve such infamous purposes, that, I believe, the greater part of the most sincerely pious, and humble christians, now make a point of exposing to the world, as little of the religion they have as possible; so that they are really possessed of much more than they seem to have. This I trust is the case with great numbers, who are little suspected of being particularly religious, because they are seldom, or never heard to talk about it. And, upon the whole, while things are so unfortunately circumstanced, I think this extreme preferable to the other; as, of all things, the reproach of hypocrisy ought to be avoided with the utmost care.

4. In a more especial manner, never fail to have recourse to God upon every occasion of strong emotion of mind, whether it be of a pleasurable, or of a painful nature. When your mind is labouring under distressing doubts, and great anxiety, or when you are any way embarrassed in the

conduct

of your affairs, fly to God, as your friend and father, your counsellor and your guide. In a sincere and earnest endeavour to discharge your duty, and to act the upright and honourable part, *commit your way unto him*, repose yourselves upon his providence, confiding in his care to over-rule every thing for the best, and you will find a great, and almost instantaneous relief. Your perturbation of mind will subside, as by a charm, and the storm will become a settled calm. Tumultuous and excessive joy will also be moderated by this means; and thus all your emotions will be rendered more equable, more pleasurable, and more lasting. And this is produced not by any supernatural agency of God on the mind, but is the natural effect of placing entire confidence in a being of perfect wisdom and goodness.

But the capital advantage you will derive from this practice will be, that the idea of God, being, by this means, associated with all the strongest emotions of your mind, your whole stock of devotional sentiments and feelings will be increased. All those strong emotions, now separately indistinguishable, will coalesce with the idea of God, and make part of the complex train of images suggested by the term, so that you will afterwards think of God

God oftner, and with more fervor than before; and the thought of him will have greater influence with you than ever.

5. In order to cultivate the spirit of habitual devotion, labour to free your minds from all consciousness of guilt, and self-reproach, by means of a constant attention to the upright and steady discharge of the whole of your duty. In consequence of neglecting our duty, we become backward, as we may say, to make our appearance before God. We cannot look up to him with full confidence of his favour and blessing; and are, therefore, too apt to omit devotion entirely. Besides, we always feel an aversion to the exercise of *self-abasement* and *contrition*, which are all the sentiments that we can with propriety indulge in those circumstances; especially as we have a secret suspicion, that we shall, for some time at least, go on to live as we have done; so that rather than confess our sins, and continue to live in them, we chuse not to make confession at all.

But this, my brethren, is egregious trifling, and highly dangerous. Thus, at best, all improvement is at a stand with us, if we be not going fatally backwards in our moral state. If this be our character (as I believe it is, more or less, that of a very

ry great number even of those I have called the better sort of the middle classes of men) let us in time, and in good earnest, cast off all our sins, negligences, and follies by true repentance. Let us draw near, and *acquaint ourselves with God*, that we may be at peace. You can have no true peace, assurance, or satisfaction of mind in this life without it: for if you be of the class I am now referring to, it is too late for you to have a perfect enjoyment of a life of sin and dissipation. And between that kind of peace, or rather *stupor*, which those who are abandoned to wickedness, those who are wholly addicted to this world, and make it their sole end (or those who are grossly ignorant of religion) enjoy, and that *inward peace and satisfaction* which accompanies the faithful and earnest discharge of every known duty, there is no sufficient medium. You may go about seeking rest in this wide space, while your hearts are divided between God and the world, but you will find none; whereas the *fruit of righteousness*, of a sincere and impartial, though imperfect obedience to the law of God, *is peace and assurance for ever.*

Sixthly, and lastly. To facilitate the exercise of devotion, cultivate in your minds just ideas of God with whom you have to do upon those occasions,

sions, and divest your minds as far as possible, of all superstitious and dishonourable notions of him. Consider him as the good father of the prodigal son, in that excellent parable of our Saviour. Let it sink deep into your minds, as one of the most important of all principles, that the God with whom we have to do is essentially, of himself, and without regard to any foreign consideration whatever, *abundant in mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that he had rather that all should come to repentance*; and then, notwithstanding you consider yourselves as frail, imperfect, and sinful creatures, and though you cannot help accusing yourselves of much negligence, folly, and vice, you may still approach him with perfect confidence in his readiness to receive, love, and cherish you, upon your sincere return to him.

In this light our Lord Jesus Christ always represented *his father and our father, his God and our God.* This is the most solid ground of consolation to minds burdened with a sense of guilt; and, what is of great advantage, it is the most natural, the most easy, and intelligible of all others. If once you quit this firm hold, you involve yourselves in a system, and a labyrinth, in which you either absolutely find no rest, and wander in uncertainty

certainty and horror; or if you do attain to any thing of assurance, it is of such a kind, and in such a manner, as can hardly fail to feed that *spiritual pride*, which will lead you to despise others; nay, unless counteracted by other causes, too often ends in a spirit of censoriousness, hatred, and persecution.

Religious melancholy, the most deplorable of all the cases of melancholy, will never be effectually relieved by any consideration, but that of the mercy and clemency of the Divine Being. This unhappy state of mind arises from superstition. It consists in an excessive and unreasonable fear of God, and is peculiarly incident to persons of the greatest tenderness of conscience. And if we consider nothing but the holiness of the divine nature, and our proneness to vice and folly, there will be no end of this distressing scrupulosity in the best-disposed minds. But, in our situation, we must learn to acquiesce in the sense of our manifold imperfections, and the unavoidable consequences of them; and to take refuge in the goodness and compassion of God, who *considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.* This is the part of humility.

So long as we are seeking to justify ourselves in the sight of God (unless our minds be absolutely blinded) we shall not fail to condemn ourselves; for *there is not a man upon earth, not even the most* just and righteous man, *who doeth good and sinneth not.* Yea, *in many things we offend all:* so that, *if we should say we have no sin, we should deceive ourselves, and the truth would not be in us:* but it is a never-failing source of consolation, that *if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Moreover, let it be considered, by persons labouring under this deplorable calamity, that this fear of displeasing God, and anxiety about our future state, is one of the best evidences we can have that *our hearts are,* upon the whole, *right towards God*; that we are seeking first, and before all things else, *the kingdom of God and* his *righteousness,* and that we are not so much concerned about *the bread that perishes,* as about *that which endures to everlasting life.* Our Saviour said, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteouness, for they shall be filled;* so that this excess of religious fear, producing despondence and melancholy, is a state

state of greater safety, though it be less pleasing, than that of religious joy.

This fear of God, when it has once exceeded its due bounds, and degenerated into superstition, and when it is not cured by a confidence in the divine mercy and clemency, by that *love which casteth out fear*, is of a most alarming nature, and has often been productive of the most fatal effects. What is it that superstitious mortals have scrupled either to do, or suffer, in order to recommend themselves to God? Voluntary pains, and penalties, of the most frightful kinds, have not been spared for this purpose; and men, like ourselves, yea, *the excellent of the earth*, men *of whom the world was not worthy* have been persecuted, and massacred, under the idea of *doing God service*.

I shall, also, here give an admonition concerning another inconvenience which we are apt to be betrayed into, by imperfect and unworthy conceptions of God. It is that kind of enthusiasm, which arises from an excess of religious joy, as the superstition I have just described arises from an excess of religious fear. It is well known, that, in the beginning of a religious life, persons of a warm temper of mind are apt to be carried away with extreme fervour. They are swelled with a tumul-

tuous and rapturous joy, attended with great zeal in the discharge of their duty. But all this is of short continuance, and generally ends in a most unaccountable *languor*, and even a total indifference about religion, which astonishes them, and which they are apt to consider as the consequences of the presence of God deserting them; that peculiar presence which they supposed to be the cause of the preceding fervour. Also, in this deadness to devotional fervour, and indifference about religion, they are apt to imagine their former experience to have been an illusion. All religion, in that state of their minds, appears like a dream; and they afterwards often fancy themselves to have been tempted by the devil, to disbelieve and renounce it all, natural and revealed.

But the peculiar warmth of those emotions is owing to the novelty of them, together with a kind of *familiarity* in our conceptions of God, which leads to such a passionate joy, as we naturally indulge with respect to beings like ourselves. But more awful, and, on account of the preceding excessive familiarity, too awful ideas of God will follow and check that fond transport. The emotion itself, having been above the usual tenor of the sensations, will of course subside, and the idea of God,

God, being as yet single, as we may say, and not associated with a sufficient variety of other objects, cannot long be retained in the mind, any more than any other single idea, unconnected with others. Consequently, other objects, and trains of thought, which we have been before accustomed to, will force themselves upon the mind; and these, not having had any previous connexions with the ideas of God and religion, will exclude them, so that the former religious state of mind will as absolutely disappear, for a time, as if it had never existed.

All this, however, is perfectly natural, and will give no alarm to those who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature. In this case, a person who would favour his progress in religion should calmly acquiesce in the imperfection of his devotion. He should give himself, in the intervals of it, to the steady prosecution of his lawful business, considering *that* as his proper *duty*, as *serving mankind*, and *serving God*, and therefore by no means foreign to religion; depending upon it, that, if he only be careful to *keep his conscience void of offence*, his devotional feelings will return in due time. Let him then endeavour to purify and exalt his conceptions of God as much as possible;

for this will tend both to give him humiliating views of himself, and to make his pious emotions more composed, and more permanent. And, by degrees, by frequently endeavouring to raise his views above the world, while he is employed in it, religion will come to be no longer the business of an hour, or of a limited time with him, but he will *walk with God all the day long*, and proceed in the path of his duty with a calm, and equal, a steady, and a persevering progress.

I shall conclude this discourse with observing, that if a person should never experience any thing of this fervour of devotion, which I have been endeavouring to describe and explain, I should by no means pronounce him the less safe on that account. This fervour of devotion is in a manner incompatible with the constitution of some persons minds; and an uniform care *to glorify God in all our actions*, and to *preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men*, without any thing of that warmth of zeal and devotion, which often delights, but also often misleads others; this, I say, will certainly be sufficient, according to the gracious constitution of the gospel, to entitle a person to that *glorious recompence of reward*, to that *eternal life*, which awaits all those who,

who, by nothing but *patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.* Our Saviour himself has assured us, that if a man *do the will of God* (he makes no other condition, he describes no particular *feeling*) he shall be to him as *a brother, a sister, or a mother.*

We well know, my christian brethren, *what it is that the Lord our God requires of us*, in order to live and to die in his favour, namely, *to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.* To this plain path of duty, then, let us adhere, without being anxious about any thing farther. Whether we have those fervours of devotion, which some feel, and are apt to be proud of, or not, we shall experience that *great peace of mind*, which *all those have who keep God's law;* and having lived the life of the righteous, our *latter end will also be like his*; the foundation of our joy being *the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.*

It is true, we are imperfect, sinful creatures; but notwithstanding this, we have all possible encouragement given us, to trust in the abundant mercy of our gracious God and father, in that mercy which is essential to his nature, as a Being

who is infinitely good, and who is *love itself*; and which, if we could entertain the least doubt concerning it, he fully declared to all the world, by Moses and the prophets, by Jesus Christ and his apostles; whom he sent into the world to preach the grateful doctrine *of repentence and remission of sins*, thereby *to redeem (i. e. to deliver) us from all iniquity*, and *to reconcile us to God.*" Animated, therefore, by the glorious promises of the gospel, *let us*, my christian brethren, *be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not finally be in vain in the Lord.*

THE

THE DUTY OF NOT LIVING TO OURSELVES.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. ROMANS XIV. 7.

IT is the excellence of our rational nature that by it we are capable of living to some known end, and of governing our lives and conduct by some rule; whereas brute creatures necessarily live and act at random, just as the present appetite influences them. Let us then, my brethren, make the most of this our perogative, by proposing to ourselves the noblest end of human life, and engaging in such a course of actions as will reflect the greatest honour upon our nature, and be productive of the most solid and lasting happiness, both in the performance and review of them.

Agreeably to this, let the principal use we make of our understanding be to discover what the great end

end of life is; and then let us use the resolution and fortitude that is either natural to us, or acquired by us, in steadily conforming ourselves to it.

But as the regular investigation of the rule of life, from the light of nature only, may be tedious and perhaps at last unsatisfactory, let us, without waiting for the result of such an enquiry upon the principles of reason, take a more clear and sure guide, the holy scriptures, in so important a subject, and see, afterwards, whether reason and experience will not give their sanction to that decision.

The great end of human life is negatively expressed by the apostle Paul in my text. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*; and, if we attend to the connection of these words, we shall find what, in the apostle's idea, is the true end to which men ought to live.

The apostle is here treating of a controversy, which had arisen in the christian church, about the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols, and keeping holy certain days, together with some other ceremonious observances, and exhorting both parties to do nothing that might give offence, or be a snare to the other, lest, by their means, any

one

one should perish for whom Christ died.

As the best foundation for mutual tenderness and charity, he reminds them that both parties acted, with regard to all ritual observances, as they imagined was the will of Christ. *He that observeth a day observeth it to the Lord; and he that observeth not a day, to the Lord he observeth it not.* And after giving his sanction in the fullest manner to this maxim, and deciding, with respect to this particular case, that all christians ought to act according to the will of Christ, and consult the good and the peace of their fellow-christians, he declares in general, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord;* that is, in all our actions our views should not be directed to ourselves, but to the interest of our holy religion. And as the christian religion has for its object the happiness of mankind (since *Christ came to bless us in turning us away from our iniquities*) it is the same thing as if he had said, the great scope of all our conduct should be the real welfare of all to whom our influence can extend.

We should therefore, my brethren, according to this apostolical maxim, by no means confine our regards

regards to ourselves, and have our own pleasure, profit, or advantage in view in every thing we undertake; but look out of, and beyond ourselves, and take a generous concern in the happiness of all our brethren of mankind, making their sorrows our sorrows, their joys our joys, and their happiness our pursuit: and it is in this disinterested conduct, and in this only, that we shall find our own true happiness.

That this is the true rule of human life, will appear, whether we consider the course of nature without us, the situation of mankind in this world, or take a nearer view of the principles of human nature. And we shall likewise find, that several considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will farther confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

1. This disinterested conduct of man is most agreeable to the course of nature without us. There is no part of the creation but, if it be viewed attentively, will expose the selfishness and narrow-mindedness of men. For among all that infinite variety of things and creatures which present themselves to our view, not one of them appears to have been made merely for itself, but every thing bears a relation to something else. They can hardly be

said

said to afford any matter for contemplation singly, and are most of all the objects of our admiration when considered as connected with other things. The primary uses of things are few, but the secondary uses of every thing are almost infinite. Indeed the secondary uses of things are so many, that we are lost in the multiplicity of them; whereas we can give no answer, if we be asked what is the primary use of any thing, but this general one, which will equally suit every thing, that every creature which is capable of happiness was made to enjoy that share of it which is suited to its nature.

Now what do we mean when we say that the several parts of nature are *adapted to* one another, but that they are *made for the use* of one another. I shall mention only a few of these mutual relations, and uses, beginning with those parts of nature which are the most remote from one another, and whose mutual relations and uses are the least obvious, and proceeding to those in which they are more obvious. The sun, the moon, the planets, and comets, are strictly connected, and combined into one system. Each body, though so exceedingly remote from the rest, is admirably adapted, by its situation, magnitude, and velocity in its orbit,

orbit, to the state of the whole, in those respects and many others. This connexion, probably, also extends to the remotest bodies in the universe: so that it is impossible to say, that the withdrawing of any one would not, in some respect or other, affect all the rest.

The clouds and the rain are designed to moisten the earth, and the sun to warm it; and the texture and juices of the earth are formed so as to receive the genial influences of both, in order to ripen and bring to perfection that infinite variety of plants and fruits, the seeds of which are deposited in it. Again, is not each plant peculiarly adapted to its proper soil and climate, so that every country is furnished with those productions which are peculiarly suited to it? Are not all plants likewise suited to the various kinds of animals which feed upon them; so that, though they enjoy a kind of life peculiar to themselves, and all the influences they are exposed to be adapted to promote that life, they themselves are as much adapted to maintain that higher kind of life which is enjoyed by creatures of the animal nature?

The various kinds of animals are again, in a thousand ways, adapted to, and formed for, the use of one another. Beasts of a fiercer nature prey upon

upon the tamer cattle: fishes of a larger size live almost wholly upon those of a less: and there are some birds which prey upon land-animals, others upon fishes, and others upon creatures of their own species.

That brute animals are excellently adapted to the use of man, and were, therefore, made to be subservient to the use of man, man will not deny. The strength of some, and the sagacity of others, are as much at our command, and are as effectually employed for our use, as if they belonged to ourselves. We can even turn to our advantage every passion of their nature; so that we can safely repose the greatest confidence in many of them. They are the guardians of our possessions and of our lives. They even enter into our resentments, and, at our instigation, take part in our revenge.

Having now advanced to man, the chief of this lower creation, and shewn that all creatures of the vegetable, and merely animal nature, live and die for his use; pride might bid us here break off the chain of mutual relations and uses, which we have been pursuing thus far, and leave man in the enjoyment of his superiority; but beside that it is contrary to the analogy of nature, in which we see nothing but what has innumerable secondary relations

lions and uses, that *man* only should be made for himself;

2. The situation of man in this world, or the external circumstances of human nature still oblige us to assert, with Paul, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.* Man himself is but a link, though the highest link, of this great chain, all the parts of which are closely connected by the hand of our divine author. Nay, the more various and extensive are our powers, either for action or enjoyment, on that very account the more multiplied and extensive are our wants: so that, at the same time that they are marks of our superiority to, they are bonds of our connection with, and signs of our dependence upon, the various parts of the world around us, and of our subservience to one another.

In fact, every time that we gratify any of our senses, though it be in consequence of the exertion of our own powers, we are reminded (if we will be so just to ourselves as to take the hint) of our dependence upon something without us. For the means of our gratifications are, in all cases, evidently without ourselves.

If we be served by the vegetables and the animals which this earth affords, we are obliged, in our turn,

turn, to favour their propagation, to promote their cultivation, and to preserve them in a healthy and vigorous state: and employment of this kind doth, in fact, take up a great part of our attention and labour. We must make the creature in some measure happy, if we would be effectually served by it. And the attention which domestic animals give to us, and their anxiety for us, is not to be compared to the attention we bestow on them, and the anxiety we undergo on their account.

But my subject leads me to attend to the connexion which man has with man, rather than with the inferior part of the creation; though it seemed not improper to point out that. In general, nothing can be more obvious than the mutual dependence of men on one another. We see it in the most barbarous countries, where the connexions of mankind are the fewest and the slightest. This dependence is more sensible, indeed, in a state of infancy, when the least remission of the care of others would be fatal to us; but it is as real and necessary, and even vastly more extensive, though less striking, when we are more advanced in life, especially in civilized countries. And the more perfect is the state of civil society, the more various and extended are the connexions which man

has with man, and the less able is he to subsist confortably without the help of others.

The business of human life, where it is enjoyed in perfection, is subdivided into so many parts (each of which is executed by different hands) that a person who would reap the benefit of all the arts of life in perfection must employ, and consequently be dependent upon thousands: he must even be under obligations to numbers of whom he has not the least knowledge.

These connexions of man with man are every day growing more extensive. The most distant parts of the earth are now connected: every part is every day growing still more necessary to every other part. And the nearer advances we make to general happiness, and the more commodious our circumstances in this world are made for us, the more intimately and extensively we become connected with, and the more closely we are dependent upon, one another.

By thus tracing the progress of man to that state of happiness which he now enjoys, we may be led to think, that, in pursuing it still farther to a more happy state of being, adapted to our social natures, we shall find ourselves still more variously and intimately connected with, and more closely dependent

dent upon, one another; which affords a far nobler and more pleasing prospect to a person of an enlarged mind, and of a social and benevolent disposition, than he could have from supposing, that after death all our mutual connexions will be broken, and that every good man will be made transcendently happy within himself, having no intercourse, or, however, no necessary intercourse with any being beside his maker.

By these arguments, which are drawn from facts that are obvious to every person who attends to the external circumstances of mankind, it is plain that no man *can* live of himself; and even that the rich are, in fact, more dependent upon others than the poor; for, having more wants, they have occasion for more, and more frequent supplies. Now it will easily be allowed, that every reason why we cannot live *of* ourselves, is an argument why we ought not to live *to* ourselves: for certainly no person receives an obligation, but he ought to confer one. Every connexion must, in some measure, be mutual, And, indeed, the circulation of good offices would in a great measure cease, if the passage were not as open, and as free from obstruction, in one part of the common channel as another. The rich, if they would receive the greatest advan-

tages from society, must contribute to the happiness of it. If they act upon different maxims, and think to avail themselves of the pleasures of society without promoting the good of it, they will never know the true pleasures of society. And, in the end, they will be found to have enjoyed the least themselves, who have least contributed to the enjoyment of others.

Thus it appears from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, that man was not made to live to himself. The same truth may be inferred,

3. From a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, and the springs of human actions.

If any man look into himself, and consider the springs and motives of his own actions, he will find that there are principles in his nature which would be of no use, were the intercourse he has with his fellow-creatures cut off: for that both the efficient and final causes of their operations are without himself. They are views of mankind, and their situations, which call those principles into action. And if we trace the operation of them, we shall clearly see that, though they be strictly connected with private happiness, their ultimate and proper object is the happiness of society.

What

What other account can we give of that impulse, which we all, more or less, feel for society? And whence is that restless and painful dissatisfaction which a man feels when he is long excluded from it, but that, if such a solitary condition, his faculties have not their proper exercise, and he is, as it were, out of his proper element?

Whence is that quick sensibility which we are conscious of with respect to both the joys and the sorrows of our fellow-creatures, if their happiness or misery were a matter of indifference to us? Can we feel what is sometimes called the contagion of thepassions, when we find that our minds contract a kind of gloom and heaviness in the company of the melancholy, and that this melancholy vanishes in company which is innocently chearful, and question the influence of social connexions? Much less can the reality or the power of the social principle be doubted when a fellow-creature in distress calls forth the most exquisite feelings of compassion, attended with instant and strong efforts towards his relief.

So essential a part of our nature are these social passions, that it is impossible for any man wholly to escape the influence of them; but if we would be witness of their strongest effects, and see them

branched out into that beautiful subordination which corresponds to all the varieties of our mutual relations, we must look into domestic life. There we shall clearly see that the most frequent and almost the only cause of a man's joys and sorrows are the joys and sorrows of others, and that the immediate aim of all his actions is the well-being and happiness of others.

Doth not the sense of honour in the human breast derive all its force from the influence which social connexions have over us? Of what use could it be but to beings formed for society? What do we infer from our dread of infamy, and from our being so strongly actuated by a passion for fame, and also from the universality and extent of this principle, but that our nature obliges us to keep up a regard to others in our whole conduct, and that the author of nature intended we should? And is it not a farther evidence of the ultimate design of this principle, that, in general, the means of being distinguished, at least of gaining a solid and lasting reputation, among men, is to be useful to mankind; public utility being the most direct road to true fame?

Every noble and exalted faculty of our nature is either directly of a social nature, or tends to strengthen

strengthen the social principle. Nothing can be more evident than that the dictates of conscience strongly enforce the practice of benevolence: and the pleasures of benevolence certainly constitute the greatest part of those pleasures which we refer to the moral sense. They must necessarily do so, while the foundation of all virtue and right conduct is the happiness of society: for then every reflexion that we have done our duty must be the same thing as a reflexion that we have contributed what was in our power to the good of our fellow-creatures.

Lastly, of what doth devotion itself consist, but the exercise of the social affections? What are the dispositions of our minds which are called forth into action in private or public prayer, but reverence for true greatness, humility, gratitude, love, and confidence in God, as the greatest and best of Beings; qualities of the most admirable use and effect in social life?

I may add, that not only are the highest and the worthiest principles of human conduct either truly social, or a reinforcement of the social principle, but even the lowest appetites and passions of our nature are far from being indifferent to social connexions, considerations, and influences. That the

pleasures we receive from the fine arts, as those of music, poetry, and painting, and the like, are enjoyed but very imperfectly except in company, is very evident to all persons who have the least taste for those pleasures. I may even venture to say, that there is hardly a voluptuary, the most devoted to the pleasures of the table, but indulges himself with more satisfaction in company than alone.

Having given this general view of the social turn of our whole natures, whereby we are continually led out of ourselves in our pursuit of happiness; I shall now consider farther, how all our appetites and passions, which are the springs of all our actions, do, in their own nature, tend to lead us out of ourselves, and how much our happiness depends upon our keeping their proper objects in view, and upon our minds being thereby constantly engaged upon something foreign to themselves; after which I shall shew what are the fittest objects thus to engage our attention.

In order to preserve mutual connexion, dependence, and harmony among all his works, it has pleased our divine author to appoint, that all our appetites and desires, to whatever sense, external or internal, they be referred, should point to something

thing beyond ourselves for their gratification; so that the idea of *self* is not in the least necessary to a state of the highest enjoyment.

When may men be said to be happy, but when their faculties are properly exercised in the pursuit of those things which give them pleasure? I say the pursuit rather than the enjoyment, not because enjoyment makes no part of our happiness, but because the vigorous and agreeable sensations with which our minds are impressed during the pursuit of a favourite object are generally, at least in this life, of vastly more consideration. The pleasure we receive the instant we arrive at the height of our wishes may be more exquisite, but the others are of much longer continuance; and, immediately upon the gratification of any of our desires, the mind is instantly reaching after some new object.

Supposing now the mind of any person to be fully and constantly engaged in the pursuit of a proper object, to the possession of which he is sensible he every day makes near approaches, and his desires be not so eager as to make him uneasy during the pursuit, what more is requisite to make him as happy as his nature can bear? He will not be the less happy because the object he is in pursuit

suit of is foreign to himself; nor would it make him any happier to have the idea of its contributing to his happiness. Nay it may be shewn, that it would be better for us, in general, with respect to real enjoyment, never to have the idea of the relation which the objects of our pursuit bear to ourselves: and this is most of all evident with respect to the higher pleasures of our nature, from which we derive our greatest happiness.

Our benevolence, for instance, leads us immediately to relieve and oblige others. Pleasure, indeed, always attends generous actions, and is consequent upon them; but the satisfaction we receive in our minds from having done kind offices to others is far less pure, and less perfectly enjoyed, if at all, when we had this, or any other private gratification in view before the action.

In like manner, he who courts applause, and does worthy actions solely with a view to obtain it, can have no knowledge of the genuine pleasure arising either from the good action itself, or the applause that is given to it; because he is sensible, in his own mind, that if those persons who praise his conduct were acquainted with the real motive of it, and knew that he meant nothing more, by his pretended acts of piety and benevolence,

lence, than to gain their applause, they would be so far from admiring and commending, that they would despise him for it.

It is evident, for the same reason, that no person can enjoy the applause of his own mind, on the account of any action which he did with a view to gain it. The pleasures of a good conscience, or, as they are sometimes called, those of the moral sense, cannot be enjoyed but by a person who steadily obeys the dictates of his conscience, and uniformly acts the part which he thinks to be right, without any view to the pleasure and self-satisfaction which may arise from it.

The idea of *self*, as it is not adapted to gratify any of our appetites, and can contribute nothing towards their gratification, can only occasion anxiety, fear, and distrust about our happiness, when it is frequently the subject of our thoughts. The apprehension and dread of misery (which is certainly the occason of most of the real trouble and misery of men in this life) is beyond measure increased from this source: and the effects of it are most sensibly felt both in the less and greater scenes of our lives.

It is chiefly an anxious solicitude about ourselves, ond the appearance we shall make in the eyes

eyes of others, which is the cause of that affectation and constraint in behaviour which is so troublesome to a person's self, and so ridiculous in the eyes of others. This trifling remark, being so frequently verified, may serve to shew that these sentiments are by no means merely speculative; but that they enter into the daily scenes of active life. Indeed they are in the highest sense practical, and upon them depend those maxims of conduct, which contain the great secret of human happiness, and which are confirmed by every day's experience.

That the idea of *self* frequently occurring to our minds in our pursuit of happiness is often a real and great obstruction to it, will be more obvious from a short series of plain facts and examples, which I shall therefore mention.

Why are brute creatures, in general, so contented and happy in their low sphere of life, and much more so than the mind of man could be in their situation? Is it not because their views are perpetually fixed upon some object within their reach, adapted to their desires; and that the abstract idea of *self*, together with the notion of their being in the pursuit of happiness, and liable to be disappointed in that pursuit, never comes in their way,

way, to interrupt the uniform and pleasurable exertion of their faculties in the pursuit of their proper objects.

The days of our infancy are happy for the same reason, notwithstanding the imperfection of our faculties, and the greater proportion of pains and disorders we are then liable to. Those years of our lives slide away in unmixed enjoyment; except when they are interrupted by the actual sensations of pain: for we are then incapable o suffering any thing from the *fear* of evil. It is not 'till after a considerable time that we get the abstract idea of *self*; an idea, which the brutes, probably, never arrive at, and which is of excellent use to us, as will be shewn in its proper place, in our pursuit of happiness, but is often abused to the great increase of our misery, as will appear by the facts we are now considering.

Why are persons whose situation in life obliges them to constant labour, either of body or mind, generally more happy than those whose circumstances do not lay them under a necessity to labour, and whose own inclination does not lead them to it; but because the former have their thoughts constantly employed in the pursuit of some end, which keeps their faculties awake, and fully

fully exerted? And this is always attended with a state of vigorous, and consequently pleasurable sensations. Persons thus employed have not much leisure to attend to the idea of self, and that anxiety which always attends the frequent recurring of it; whereas a person who has no object foreign to himself, which constantly and necessarily engages his attention, cannot have his faculties fully exerted; and therefore his mind cannot possibly be in that state of vigorous sensation in which happiness consists.

The mind of such a person, having nothing without him sufficient to engage its attention, turns upon itself. He feels he is not happy, but he sees not the reason of it. This again excites his wonders, vexation, and perplexity. He tries new expedients; but, as these are only temporary, and generally whimsical choices, none of them have sufficient power to fix and confine his attention. He is still perpetually thinking about himself, and wondering and uneasy that he is not happy. This anxious perplexed state of mind, affecting the nervous system, necessarily occasions a more irritable state of the nerves, and of the brain, which makes the unhappy person subject to more frequent alarms, to greater anxiety and distress than before;

before; 'till, these mental and bodily disorders mutually increasing one another, his condition is at length the most wretched and distressing that can be conceived. No bodily pain, no rack, no torture, can equal the misery and distress of a human being whose mind is thus a prey to itself. No wonder that, in this situation, many persons wish the utter extinction of their being, and often put a period to their lives.

This is certainly the most deplorable situation to which a human being can be reduced in this world, and is doubly the object of our compassion, when the disorder has its seat originally in the body, in such a manner, as that no endeavours to engage a man's thought upon other objects can force his attention from himself.

It is no wonder that we see more of this kind of unhappiness in the higher ranks of life, and among persons who are in what is called *easy circumstances* than in any other. Indeed, the case is hardly possible in any other than in easy circumstances: for did a man's circumstances really find constant employment for his thoughts, were his business so urgent as to leave him no leisure for suspence and uncertainty what to do, it is plain, from the preceding principles, that such anxiety and distress could not

not take place. It is well known that the mind suffers more in a state of uncertainty and suspense, for want of some motive to determine a man's choice, than he can suffer in the vigorous prosecution of the most arduous undertaking. I appeal to men of leisure, and particularly to persons who are naturally of an active and enterprizing disposition, for the truth of this fact.

These principles likewise, as is evident without entering into a detail of particulars, furnish us with a good reason why we generally see fathers and mothers of large families infinitely more easy, chearful, and happy, than those persons who have no family-connexions. The greater affluence, ease, and variety of pleasures which these can command (subject to the inconveniences I have mentioned, and which are commonly visible enough in the case I refer to) are a poor equivalent for the necessary, constant, and vigorous exertion of their faculties, and consequently the strong sensations, and lively enjoyments, which a variety of family-cares, conjugal and parental tenderness, supply for the others.

This would be the case universally, where large families could subsist, if the parents had sufficient employment, and if an early-acquired taste for superflu-

superfluities had not taken too deep root in their minds.

Happy is it for the world, and a great mark of the wisdom and goodness of divine providence, that men's minds are so constituted, that though they be in easy circumstances, they are never completely satisfied. The passions of most men are still engaging them in a variety of pursuits, in which they are as eager, and which they prosecute with as much alacrity and earnestness, as if necessity compelled them to it. Otherwise, every person who could live easy would be inevitably miserable.

Infinitely happier would it be for themselves, and for the world, if all their pursuits were such as would give them satisfaction upon the reflection as well as in the pursuit, and be of real advantage to the rest of mankind; which two circumstances never fail to coincide. However, with regard to a person's self in this life, any end is unspeakably better than no end at all: and such is the wise appointment of providence, that bad ends tend, in a variety of ways, to check and defeat themselves, and to throw the minds of men into better, nobler, and more satisfactory pursuits; a consideration, which cannot fail to suggest, to a benevolent and pious

mind, a prospect of a future happy and glorious state of things.

It may be said, that if happiness consist in, or depend upon the exertion of our faculties upon some object foreign to ourselves, it is a matter of indifference what the object be. I answer that during the pursuit it is nearly so, and universal experience, I imagine, will justify the observation. This is the reason why we see men equally eager, and equally happy in the pursuit of a variety of things which appear trifling to one another. Thus the florist, the medalist, and critic, the antiquary, and every adept in the minuter branches of science, all enjoy equal happiness in the pursuit of their several objects; and as much as the historian, the astronomer, the moralist, or the divine, who refers his nobler studies to no higher end, and to whom they only serve as an exercise of his faculties.

But though an eager pursuit tends to keep the mind in a state of vigorous and lively sensation, that pursuit can only give us the *maximum*, the highest possible degree, of happiness, which has the following characters. It must be attended with the probability of success, consequently it must be generally successful; and it must also terminate

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in such gratifications as are least inconsistent with themselves, or with the other gratifications of which our nature makes us capable. And it may be demonstrated (though I shall not undertake to do it particularly in this place) that no pursuits answer to this description but those in which the love of mankind, the love of God, or the dictates of conscience, engage us.

For in all other pursuits, such as those of sensual pleasure, the pleasures of imagination, and ambition, we are liable to frequent disappointments; the gratifications in which they terminate are inconsistent with themselves, and with each other; and they almost entirely deaden and disqualify the mind for the nobler pleasures of our nature. It is the love of God, the love of mankind, and a sense of duty which engage the minds of men in the noblest of all pursuits. By these we are carried on with increasing alacrity and satisfaction. Even the pains and distresses in which we involve ourselves by these courses are preferable to the pleasures attending the gratification of our lower appetites.

Besides, these noble pursuits, generally at least, allow us even more of the lower gratifications of our nature than can be obtained by a direct pursuit

of them. For a little experience will inform us, that we receive the most pleasure from these lower appetites of our nature, as well from the highest sources of pleasure which we are capable of, when we have their gratification least of all in view. There can be no doubt, for instance, but that the labourer, who eats and drinks merely to satisfy the calls of hunger and thirst, has vastly more pleasure in eating and drinking than the epicure who studies the pleasing of his palate.

They are the pleasures of benevolence and piety which most effectually carry us out of ourselves; whereas every other inferior pursuit suggests to us, in a thousand respects, the idea of *self*, the unseasonable intervention of which may be called the *worm* which lies *at the root* of all human bliss. And never can we be completely happy, 'till we *love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves.*

This is the christian *self-annihilation*, and a state of the most complete happiness to which our natures can attain; when, without having the least idea of being in the pursuit of our own happiness, our faculties are wholly absorbed in those noble and exalted pursuits, in which we are sure not to

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be finally disappointed, and in the course of which we enjoy all the consistent pleasures of our whole nature. When, *rejoicing with all that rejoice, weeping with all that weep*, and intimately associating the idea of God, the maker of all things, our father and our friend, with all the works of his hands, and all the dispensations of his providence, we constantly triumph in the comfortable sense of the divine presence and approbation, and in the transporting prospect of advancing every day nearer to the accomplishment, of his glorious purposes for the happiness of his creatures.

If this be the proper and supreme happiness of man, it may be asked, Of what use is the principle of self-interest? I answer, that though an attention to it be inconsistent with pure unmixed happiness, yet a moderate attention to it is of excellent use in our progress towards it. It serves as a scaffold to a noble and glorious edifice, though it be unworthy of standing as any part of it. It is of more particular use to check and restrain the indulgence of our lower appetites and passions, before other objects and motives have aequired a sufficient power over us. But though we ought, therefore, to exhort those persons who are immersed in sensuality and grosa vices, to abandon those indulgences out

of a regard to their true interest, it is advisable to withdraw this motive by degrees. However, as we shall never arrive at absolute perfection, we necessarily must, and indeed ought to be influenced by it more or less through the whole course of our existence, only less and less perpetually.

The principle of self-interest may be regarded as a medium between the lower and the higher principles of our nature, and therefore, of principal use in our transition, as we may call it, from an imperfect to a more perfect state.

Perhaps the following view of this subject may be the easier to us. A regard to our greatest happiness must necessarily govern our conduct with respect to all those virtues which are termed *private virtues*, as temperance, chastity, and every branch of self-government: but it always does harm as a motive to the *social virtues*. When, therefore, self-government, which is our first step towards happiness, is established; we ought to endeavour to excite men to action by higher and nobler motives. For, with regard to all those virtues, the ultimate object of which is not private happiness, an attention to self-interest is of manifest prejudice to us; and this through the whole course of our lives,

lives, imperfect as we are, and as much occasion as we have for every effectual motive to virtue.

We are now come, in the last place, to see what considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will farther confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

That the scriptures join the voice of all nature around us, informing man that he is not made for himself; that they inculcate the same lesson which we learn both from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, and also from a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, will be evident whether we consider the object of the religion they exhibit (that is, the temper to which we are intended to be formed by it) or the motives by which it is enforced and recommended to us in them.

That the end and design of our holy religion, christians, was to form us to the most disinterested benevolence cannot be doubted by any person who consults the holy scriptures, and especially the books of the New-Testament.

There we plainly see the principle of benevolence represented, when it is in its due strength and degree, as equal in point of intenseness to that of self-love. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy-*

eslf. The plain consequence of this is, that if all our brethren of mankind with whom we are connected have an equal claim upon us (since our connexions are daily growing more extensive, and we ourselves are consequently growing daily of less relative importance in our own eyes) the principle of benevolence must in the end absolutely swallow up that of self-love.

The most exalted devotion, as even superior both to self-love and benevolence, is always every where recommended to us; and the sentiments of devotion have been shewn greatly to aid, and, in fact, to be the same with those of benevolence: and they must be so, unless it can be shewn that we have some senses, powers, or faculties which respect the Deity only.

In order to determine men to engage in a course of disinterested and generous actions, every motive which is calculated to work upon human nature is employed. And as mankind in general are deeply immersed in vice and folly, their hopes, but more especially their fears, are acted upon in the strongest manner by the prospect of rewards and punishments. Even temporal rewards and punishments were proposed to mankind in the earlier and ruder ages of the world. But as our notions of happiness

ness grow more enlarged, infinitely greater, but indefinite objects of hope and fear are set before us. Something unknown, but something unspeakably dreadful in a future world is perpetually held up to us, as a guard against the allurements to vice and excess which the world abounds with. And still farther to counteract their baleful influences, the heavenly world (the habitation of good men after death) is represented to us as a place in which we shall be completely happy, enjoying something which is described as more than eye hath seen, ear heard, or than the heart of man can conceive.

These motives are certainly addressed to the principle of self-interest, urging us out of a regard to ourselves, and our general happiness, *to cease to do evil, and learn to do well.* And, indeed, no motives of a more generous nature, and drawn from more distant considerations can be supposed sufficient to influence the bulk of mankind, and *bring them from the power of sin, and Satan, unto God.*

But when, by the influence of these motives, it may be supposed that mankind are in some measure recovered from the grosser pollutions of the world, and the principle of self-interest has been played, as it were, against itself, and been a means of

of engaging us in a course and habit of actions which are necessarily connected with, and productive of more generous and noble principles, then these nobler principles are those which the sacred writers chiefly inculcate.

Nothing is more frequent with the sacred writers, than to exhort men to the practice of their duty as the command of God, from a principle of love to God, of love to Christ, and of love to mankind, more especially of our fellow-christians; and from a regard to the interest of our holy religion: motives which do not at all turn the attention of our minds upon themselves. This is not borrowing the aid of self-love to strengthen the principles of benevolence and piety; but it is properly deriving additional strength to these noble dispositions, as it were, from within themselves, independent of foreign considerations.

We may safely say, that no degree or kind of self-love is made use of in the scriptures, but what is necessary to raise us above that principle. And some of the more refined kinds of self-love, how familiar soever they may be in some systems of morals, never come in sight there. We are never exhorted in the scriptures to do benevolent actions for the sake of the reflex pleasures of benevolence,

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or pious actions with a view to the pleasures of devotion. This refined kind of self-love is no where to be found in the scriptures.

Even the pleasures of a good conscience, though they be of a more general nature, and there be less refinement in them than in some other pleasures which are connected with the idea of *self*, and though they be represented in the scriptures as the consequence of good actions, and a source of joy, as a testimony of a person's being in the favour of God, and in the way to happiness, are perhaps never directly proposed to us as the reward of virtue. This motive to virtue makes a greater figure in the system of the later stoics (those heathen philosophers who, in consequence of entertaining the most extravagant idea of their own merit, really idolized their own natures to a degree absolutely blasphemous) than in the scriptures. And if we consider the nature of this principle, we shall soon be sensible that if it be inculcated as a motive to virtue, and particularly the virtues of a sublimer kind, it should be with great caution, and in such a manner as shall have the least tendency to encourage self-applause. For does not self-applause border very nearly upon pride and self conceit, and that species of it which is called spiritual pride, and

and which is certainly a most malignant disposition?

If this same principle have power to excite such ridiculous vanity, intolerable arrogance, inveterate rancour, and supercilious contempt of others, when it has nothing but the trifling advantage of skill in criticism, a talent for poetry, a taste for belles lettres, or some other of the minuter parts of science to avail itself of; what have we not to dread from it, when it can boast of what is universally acknowledged to be a far superior kind of excellence?

To guard against this dangerous rock, so fatal to every genuine principle of virtue, the utmost humility, self-diffidence, and trust in God are ever recommended to us in the holy scriptures. Good men are taught to regard him as the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They are represented as disclaiming all the merit of their own good works, and expecting all favour and happiness, private or public, from the free goodness and undeserved mercy of God. *When we have done all that is commanded us we must say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done* only *that which it was our duty to do.*

In the representation which our Saviour has given

ven us of the proceedings of the last great day of judgment, it is in this respect that the temper of the righteous is contrasted with that of the wicked, though that was not the principal design of the representation. The righteous seem surprized at the favourable opinion which their judge expresses of them, and absolutely disclaim all the good works which he ascribes to them. *When saw we thee*, say they, *hungry, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink; when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in, or naked and cloathed thee; when saw we thee sick and in prison and came unto thee?* Whereas the wicked are represented as equally surprized at the censure our Lord passes upon them, and insist upon their innocence; saying, *When saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?*

This too is the excellent moral conveyed to us in the parable of the pharisee and the publican; and the import of one of the blessings which our Lord pronounced in a solemn manner at the beginning of his ministry on earth, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; and also the spirit of many of our Lord's invectives against the pride and hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees.

No

No other vice seems capable of disturbing the equal and generous temper of our Lord. Other vices rather excite his compassion, but pride, together with its usual attendant hypocrisy, never fails to rouse his most vehement indignation: insomuch that before we attend to the heinous nature, and dreadful consequences of those vices, we are apt rather to blame our Lord for intemperate wrath upon these occasions, and to wonder why a person, who otherwise appears to be so meek, should, in this case only, be so highly provoked.

How severely doth he check the least tendency towards pride and ambition in his own disciples, whenever he discovers in any of them a disposition to aspire to distinction and superiority; closing his admonition, on one remarkable occasion, with these words, which are characteristic of the temper of his religion; Matt. xxiii. 11, 12. *He that is greatest among you shall be your servant: Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted?*

What temper can be supposed more proper to qualify us for joining the glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, and perhaps innumerable orders of beings far superior to us both in understanding and goodness, when all the splendour

dour of the invisible world shall be thrown open to us, but a spirit of the deepest humility, and the purest benevolence? This alone can dispose us truly to rejoice in the view of every kind and degree of excellence wherever found, without the least uneasiness arising from pride, envy, jealousy, or dislike; all which vicious qualities of the mind are nearly connected together. And how can a spirit of true humility and pure benevolence, which cannot exist without humility, be attained, if our regards be perpetually, or frequently, directed to ourselves? Where *self* is considered, pride, vanity, or self-conceit, with all their hateful consequences, seem, in some degree, to be unavoidable.

Whoever, therefore, lays the foundation of human virtue on the principle of self-interest, or, what is nearly the same thing, self-applause, is erecting a fabric which can never rest on such supports; and he will be found in fact to have been pulling down with one hand what he was endeavouring to build up with the other.

To draw to a conclusion. This doctrine abounds with the noblest practical uses, and points out directly the great rule of life, and source of happiness; which is to give ourselves wholly up to some

some employment, which may, if possible, engage all our faculties, and which tends to the good of society. This is a field which is open to the exertion of all human powers, and in which all mankind may be equally, mutually, and boundlessly happy.

This will render all expedients to *kill time* unnecessary. With our affections and our faculties thus engrossed by a worthy object, we scarcely need to fear being ever dull, pensive, or melancholy, or to know what it is to have our time hang heavy upon our hands. And I think I may so far presume upon the known connexion of mind and body, as to say that this is the best preservative against hypochondriacal disorders, to which persons whose situation in the world doth not lead them into the active scenes of life are peculiarly subject. Every day passed in the steady and earnest discharge of a man's known duty will pass with uniform chearfulness and alacrity. And in the glorious animating prospect of a future happy state of mankind, on which, in a humble trust and confidence in the assistance and grace of God, he has spent all his cares, and exerted all his powers, that joy will spring up in his heart here, which will hereafter be *unspeakable and full of glory*.

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If troubles and persecutions arise on account of our adhering to our duty; if we be opposed in the prosecution of laudable undertakings, or suffer in consequence of undertaking them; the true piety of a person who habitually lives to God, and not to himself, is capable of converting them all into pure unmixed joy and transport. Then the human mind, roused to the most intense exertion of all its faculties, burdened with no consciousness of guilt, referring itself absolutely to the disposal of its God and father, distrusting its own powers, and confiding in the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, acquires a fervour of spirit, a courage, fortitude, and magnanimity, tempered with the most perfect serenity, and the greatest presence of mind, that is sufficient, and more than sufficient, to bear a man through every difficulty, and even to convert all pain into pleasure. His highly agitated state of mind, in those trying circumstances, is almost pure rapture and extasy.

In those circumstances, which appear so distressing, numbers, I doubt not, have been able, according to our blessed Saviour's direction, to *rejoice and be exceeding glad, knowing that their reward was great in heaven*; and have experienced more real comfort, peace of mind, and inward joy, in the

greatest adversity, than they had ever felt in the days of their prosperity. Yea, what is related by historians of some christian and protestant martyrs appears to me not incredible; namely, that in the midst of flames they have felt no pain. Their minds were so intensely agitated, and so wholly occupied with opposite sensations, of the most exalted nature, as to exclude all external sensation whatever, vastly more than we can form any idea of from the trances and reveries which any person was ever subject to.

What the extraordinary exercises of devotion are able to do upon extraordinary occasions, the habitual moderate exercise of piety will be able to do in the ordinary course, and the common troubles of our lives; so that it may not only be compared to a strong cordial, to be applied when the mind is ready to faint under adversity, but to that food which is the daily support of our lives.

To have God always in our thoughts, is not possible in this world. Present objects, to the influence of which we are continually exposed, must necessarily engage a great part of our attention; and worldly objects, by continually engrossing our thoughts, are apt to become of too great importance to us. We grow anxious about them, and

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our minds are harrassed and fatigued with a constant and close attention to them. Now, it is when the mind is in this state, or rather tending toward it, that the benign influences of devotion are, in the ordinary course of our lives, the most sensibly felt; when the mind, looking off, and above all worldly objects, and deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, unburdens itself of every anxiety, and casts all its cares upon its heavenly father; and when the preceding tumult and disorder in the passions only serves to augment that unspeakable joy, satisfaction and confidence, with which a deep sense of the presence and providence of God inspires the soul.

The relief which a benevolent mind feels from communicating its troubles and cares to an intimate friend, in whose wisdom and integrity he can confide, though of the same nature, is but a faint image of what the truly pious soul feels in the delightful seasons of the devout intercourse which he maintains with his God.

This is a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction to a truly devout mind, which the wicked, those persons who live to themselves and not to mankind, or to God, intermeddle not with. Not

even an idea of that sweet tranquility, exalted joy, and calm fortitude which true devotion inspires can be communicated to another who hath had no experience of it himself. This is true of those things of which St. Paul says that *the animal man cannot comprehend them, and* that *they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.*

I would be no advocate for enthusiasm. The fervour of devotion cannot be always kept up. That is inconsistent with the condition of our nature, and far from being necessary in our present state: but that cheerful serenity and composure in which moderate acts of devotion leave the mind is an excellent temper for entering upon, and persevering with spirit and alacrity in, any useful and honourable undertaking.

The sum of this practical doctrine, suggested by revelation, and confirmed by reason and observation is, that NO MAN CAN BE HAPPY WHO LIVES TO HIMSELF; BUT THAT TRUE HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN HAVING OUR FACULTIES WHOLLY ENGROSSED BY SOME WORTHY OBJECT, IN THE PURSUIT OF WHICH THE STRONGEST AND BEST OF OUR AFFECTIONS HAVE THEIR FULL PLAY, AND IN WHICH WE ENJOY ALL THE CONSISTENT PLEASURES OF OUR WHOLE NATURE;

NATURE; that though a regard to our greatest happiness be of excellent use, particularly about the beginning of our progress towards perfectio and happiness, in bringing our inferior appetites and passions into due subjection to the superior powers of our nature, yet that self-love, and a regard to ourselves is very apt to grow too intense, and is in fact the cause of a great deal of the useless anxiety, perplexity, and misery which is in the world; and that therefore it ought to be our care, that our minds be engrossed as much as possible by other objects; and that even motives to virtue which turn our attention frequently upon ourselves should be used with caution; for fear of feeding that vanity and self-conceit which we ought to study every method of repressing, as the greatest bane of true religion, being most opposite to the genuine temper of christianity, and most destructive of human happiness.

I cannot make a better application of this general maxim of conduct, namely, to propose to ourselves, and, in the language of Solomon, *to pursue with all our might* some worthy object, some honourable and useful employment, especially in the present circumstances of things among us, than in encouraging you, my brethren in the ministry, to

prosecute with vigour that excellent scheme in which you have already shewn so much laudable zeal, and have made so successful a progress. I need not add, that I mean the scheme of a provision for the more comfortable support of ministers' widows and orphans.

This particular subject has the easiest and happiest connexion imaginable with the general one I have been discussing; as it is both a worthy and benevolent undertaking itself, and is designed for the relief of those persons who have shewn themselves to be actuated by the same excellent sentiments; of persons who have not lived to themselves, but to society; who have entered into the social connexions of life, and who have exposed themselves and families to peculiar hardships in consequence of those honourable connexions.

If any set of duties shine with peculiar lustre and make a greater figure than the rest in our holy religion, they are those of humanity and compassion. Through all the books both of the Old and New Testament, they are the most frequently, and the most earnestly inculcated of any particular duties: doubtless, because they are of the strongest obligation in themselves, the finest exercise for our faculties (having the greatest tendency to advance the perfec-

perfection of our nature) and the best adapted to promote the ease and happiness of mankind in general.

The Divine Being himself is always represented as taking particular notice of the treatment which the poor and distressed meet with. He hath stiled himself the *father of the fatherless, and the widow's God:* and therefore when we undertake those humane and kind offices, we may with more propriety than in any other sphere, consider ourselves as acting the glorious part of God's deputies, and as stewards of the divine grace and goodness here below.

If we be obliged to contribute of our substance to the relief of the distressed, much more is it incumbent upon us not to withhold our labour and our interest, in the prosecution of proper schemes for their relief. And the method in which it is proposed to relieve the distressed persons we have now under consideration is one that is quite free from all the difficulties which lie in the way of common charities (though the objections to common charities have no weight in this particular case) and a method which is, in all cases, the most eligible, when it can be pursued with effect; namely, to put those persons whose circumstances

are distressing, or liable to be so, in the way of relieving themselves. It is to exert our humanity in the way of encouraging, if not industry, at least frugality.

This, consequently, is a method which will relieve the minds of the distressed of a burthen which is often less tolerable than most kinds of calamity, namely, the sense of dependence and obligation. It may be a false kind of delicacy which makes some persons so extremely sensible upon these occasions; but it is a sensibility which only the most amiable and deserving persons are subject to; and there is certainly a peculiar propriety in attending to this circumstance in the case before us.

Who are, generally, the unhappy widows whose case we are now considering, but persons who have been brought up in easy and genteel circumstances, and whose small fortunes, joined to the income of their husbands, and managed with great frugality, have been just sufficient to bring up a family in that decent and reputable manner, in which a regard to their station in life, and to the congregations in whose service their husbands were engaged, are universally acknowledged to require. These unhappy persons, therefore, are reduced a

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once, upon the death of their husbands, and the great reduction, if not total ceasing of their incomes (which is the immediate consequence of that event) to one of the most distressing situations that can occur in human life.

Here is to be seen the deepest affliction for the loss of that companion and friend for whose sake they had sacrificed perhaps better prospects, and situations in which it would have been more in their power to support themselves and families in the like circumstances; the greatest indigence, to which they have never been accustomed, with which they are therefore wholly unprepared to encounter, and which, in their time of life, they are utterly incapable of remedying; and all this joined with that generosity of sentiment, inspired by their education, and cherished by the company and acquaintance they have always kept up, to which relief itself is distressing, unless conferred with the greatest prudence and delicacy.

To augment the distress of these disconsolate widows, they see nothing before them but a number of children educated in the same decent and frugal manner in which their parents were obliged to live, with expectations (if they be of an age capable of having any) almost unavoidably above their

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rank and fortune, wholly unprovided or, and destitute, in a great measure, of their father's interest and friendships, on which were founded all their expectations of being introduced with tolerable prospects into the world.

Here then, my brethren, are the worthiest objects of charity, and here is the most unexceptionable and desirable method of bestowing it; so that no circumstance seems wanting to engage every benevolent and public-spirited person to join heartily in a scheme which is calculated for so excellent a purpose.

Consider, my brethren, how many worthy persons are anxious about the prudence and the vigour of your present resolutions; with what tender and heart-piercing concern the worthy and pious parent regards the wife of his bosom, and the children of his love, when he feels the symptoms of his own declining nature, and dreads to communicate the alarming intelligence; and how earnestly he wishes it may be in his power to do something, while living, which, when he is dead, may be the means of providing a small substitute for the fruit of his present labours; when alas, no substitute can be provided for himself, for his advice, his instructions, his consolations, the charms of his conversation,

versation, and all his personal kind offices. Of what a load of anxiety and distress, which tends to hasten the dreaded event, would this scheme ease the worthiest and most considerate of human minds?

Consider also, how many persons, the best qualified to bear their parts with propriety and honour in social life, and to exhibit the finest example of the several relative and domestic duties to others, and who are thereby capable of having their own usefulness greatly extended, are restrained from engaging in social connexions by that peculiar tenderness and humanity, which a liberal education, and a life devoted to the service of a benevolent religion inspires; and also by that very prudence, which would eminently contribute to their fulfilling the most important duties of it in the most exemplary manner.

So excellent an undertaking will doubtless be its own sufficient reward; and if *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, what good may you not reasonably expect that the devout blessings and fervent prayers of the many excellent persons interested in your present resolutions will procure you, from that God *who is able to make all grace abound towards you and to supply all your wants, out of his abundant fulness in* Christ Jesus?

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Let *us* then, my brethren, *be stedfast and unmoveable* in this, as well as *always abounding in every good work; for-as-much as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

OF

OF THE

DANGER

OF

BAD HABITS.

Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone.
HOSEA IV. 17.

EPHRAIM is here put for the whole kingdom of Israel, of which it was a part; and this awful sentence pronounced upon it was delivered during its declension, and not long before its final dissolution by the kings of Assyria.

Many prophets had God sent to this unhappy nation, and by repeated messages had he expostulated with them, from time to time, for their crying wickedness and provocations. They had had *line upon line*, and *precept upon precept*; but all had been to no purpose. They shewed no sign of repentance, but *held fast their iniquity, and would not let it go* 'till the divine patience and forbearance were

were wearied out. Mercy could plead for them no longer, their fate was determined; and the execution of the just judgments of God upon them was only delayed, but was sure to take place in the end.

This is the case of a whole nation abandoned of God in this fearful manner. But whatever has been the case of one nation may not only be the case of another nation, but also that of any *individual;* and it is the possibility of this being the case of our own nation, or of ourselves, that makes it to demand our attention. To the Almighty, with respect to moral government, a nation is as one man, and one man as a whole nation. He punishes vice, and he rewards virtue in both; and whatever is agreeable to wisdom and equity in the case of a nation is likewise agreeable to wisdom and equity with respect to individuals. Supposing, therefore, that the cases are exactly similar, I shall, in discoursing from these words,

First, State the case with as much exactness as I can;

Secondly, Shew the probability and danger of it with respect to human nature; and

Thirdly, Consider the equity and propriety of it with respect to God, applying the whole doctrine to the cases of individuals.

In

In the first place, I am to state this case with as much exactness as I can.

In general, when any person is in the condition of Ephraim in my text, so that God shall, as it were, say of him, *he is joined to idols*, (he is joined to his lusts, and vices,) *let him alone*, his day of trial and probation may be said to be, to all important purposes, expired. He is no longer *a subject of moral government*, because he is utterly incapable of *amendment*, which is the end of all moral discipline; and though, through the goodness of God, which is over all his works, he may live many years longer, yet his final doom is in reality fixed; his sentence is irrevocable, and the execution of it merely deferred.

Not that the reformation of any sinner is ever *naturally impossible*, or that, if he truly repent, he shall not find favour at the hand of God. *For nothing is impossible with God*, and a *truly humble, penitent, and contrite heart he will never despise*, whenever, and wheresoever he finds it. But the change may be *morally impossible*, or not to be expected according to the usual course of things; and this is sufficient to authorize us to make use of the language.

Supposing a man to have lived so long in the habits

habits of vice, as to have lost all relish for every thing that is good, that he has no pleasure in the company of the sober, the virtuous, and the pious, but only in that of those who are as abandoned as himself, and that the greatest satisfaction he has is in corrupting others (and farther than this depravity cannot go); supposing that, in the course of his life, this man, besides every advantage for *instruction*, had experienced a great variety of prosperity and adversity; and yet that prosperity, instead of making him more thankful and obedient to God, made him forget him the more; and that afflictions, instead of softening and bettering his heart, only served to harden it, and make it worse: Do I say that this abandoned wretch *cannot* be reformed, that God cannot, by any methods whatever, work upon his heart, and bring him to serious thought and reflexion? By no means.—That would be to limit the power of God, to whom all things are possible. He can work *miracles*, if he should think proper so to do. But then I say this would be a proper miracle, such as, at this day, we are not authorized to expect. And judging by what we see actually to take place, and what we must conclude to be just and right, God *may*, and probably *will*, leave such an one to himself. He

may

may determine to try him no longer by any of those methods of his providence which are usually employed for the purpose of reclaiming sinners.

For instance, afflictions, and especially bodily sickness, are a great means of softening and bettering the minds of men; but God may resolve that he shall be visited with no remarkable sickness, until he be overtaken with his last; or he may cut him off by a sudden and unexpected death, in the midst of his crimes. The death of our friends, or any calamities befalling them, have often been the means, in the hands of divine providence, of bringing to serious thought and reflexion those who have survived those strokes; but God may resolve never to touch him in so tender a part, but rather make use of his death as a warning and example to others.

Now when a man is thus *left of God*, and no providential methods are used to reclaim him, we may conclude that he is irrecoverably lost. It is, in fact, and according to the course of nature (and we know of no deviations from it since the age of the apostles) absolutely impossible that he should repent, or be reformed. And though he should continue to live ever so long after God has thus forsaken him, he is only, in the awful language of

scripture, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; and there remains nothing for him but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of that fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries of God.*

Having thus stated the nature of this awful case, and shewn in what sense, and on what account, it may be said that it is quite desperate and hopeless, viz. because it may be morally impossible that he should ever truly repent and be reformed, by reason of God's withdrawing those providential methods by which he uses to work upon men's hearts, and to bring them to serious thought and reflexion, I come

2dly, To consider the *probability* and *danger* of the case with respect to human nature; how far men are liable to fall into this fearful condition, and by what means they fall into it.

A man's case may be pronounced to be thus desperate, when his mind is brought into such a state, as that the necessary means of reformation shall have lost their effect upon him; and this is the natural consequence of confirmed habits of vice, and a long-continued neglect of the means of religion and virtue, which is so far from being an impossible or improbable case, that it is a very general one.

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In order to be the more sensible of this, you are to consider that vice is a *habit*, and therefore of a subtle and insinuating nature. By easy, pleasing, and seemingly harmless actions, men are often betrayed into a *progress*, which grows every day more alarming. Our virtuous resolutions may break with difficulty. It may be with pain and reluctance that we commit the *first acts* of sin, but the *next* are easier to us; and use, custom, and habit, will at last reconcile us to any thing, even things the very idea of which might at first be shocking to us.

Vice is a thing not to be trifled with. You may, by the force of vigorous resolution, break off in the early stages of it; but *habits*, when they have been confirmed, and long continued, are obstinate things to contend with, and are hardly ever entirely subdued. When bad habits *seem* to be overcome, and we think we have got rid of our chains, they may perhaps only have become, as it were, *invisible*; so that when we thought we had recovered our freedom, and strength, so as to be able to repel any temptation, we may lose all power of resistance on the first approach of it.

A man who has contracted a habit of vice, and been abandoned to sinful courses for some time, is

never out of danger. He is exactly in the case of a man who has long laboured under a chronical disease, and is perpetually subject to a relapse. The first shock of any disorder a man's constitution may bear, and if it be not naturally subject to it, he may perfectly recover, and be out of danger. But when the general habit is such, as that a *relapse* is apprehended, a man's friends and physicians are alarmed for him.

The reason is, that a relapse does not find a person in the condition in which he was when the first fit of illness seized him. That gave his constitution a shock, and left him enfeebled, so as to be less able to sustain another shock; and especially if it be more violent than the former, as is generally the case in those disorders.

In the very same dangerous situation is the man who has ever been addicted to vicious courses. He can never be said to be *perfectly recovered*, whatever appearances may promise, but is always in danger of a fatal relapse. He ought, therefore, to take the greatest care of himself. He is not in the condition of a person who has *never known the ways of wickedness*. He ought, therefore, to have the greatest distrust of himself, and set a double watch over his thoughts, words, and

actions

actions, for fear of a surprize. For if once, thro' the force of any particular temptation, he should fall back into his former vicious courses, and his former disposition should return, his case will probably be desperate. He will plunge himself still deeper in wickedness; and his having abstained for a time will only, as it were, have whetted his appetite, and make him swallow down the poison of sin by larger and more eager draughts than ever.

Such persons may be so entirely in the power of vicious habits, that they shall be in no sense *their own masters*. They may even see the danger they are in, wish to free themselves from the habits they have contracted, and yet find they have no force, or resolution, to relieve themselves. They are not to be rescued from *the snare of the destroyer*, and brought to their *right mind*, but by some uncommon and alarming providence, which is in the hands of God, and which he may justly withhold, when his patience and long-suffering have been much abused. Justly may he say to such an habitual sinner, as he did to Ephraim in the text; *He is joined to idols*, he is joined to his lusts, *let him alone*. He is determined to have the *pleasure of sin*, let him receive the *wages of sin* also.

This brings me to the third head of my discourse, in which I propose to consider the equity of the proceding with rsspect to God.

It may be said that it is not agreeable to equity for God to favour some with the means of improvement, and suffer others to abandon themselves to destruction without a possibility escaping. But I answer, that the persons whose case I have been describing have had, aud have outlived, their *day of grace.* God has long exercised forbearance towards them, but they have wearied it out; and it could not be expected to last for ever. They have had gracious invitations to repentance, but they have slighted them all: they *stopped their ears,* and *refused to return.* They have been tried with a great variety both of merciful and of afflictive providences, but they made no good use of them. *Why then,* as the prophet says, *should they be stricken any more, when they will only revolt more and more?*

A day of trial and probation, or what is frequently called a *day of grace,* must necessarily have some period; else when would the time of retribution, when would the time of rewards and punishments, take place? A state of trial necessarily respects some future state, in which men must receive

ceive according to their deeds. But this state of trial it has pleased God to make of uncertain duration, no doubt to keep us always watchful, having our accounts always in readiness, because *in such an hour as we think not our Lord may come*, and require them. The state of trial, therefore, is with some of much longer duration than it is with others: and God is the sovereign arbiter of every thing relating to it. He makes our lives longer or shorter, as seems good in his sight, and at death a state of trial ends of course. We may, therefore, as well pretend to question the justice and equity of God's cutting us off by death when and in what manner he pleases, as arraign his justice in sealing up our doom, though while we live, whenever he pleases.

No doubt God gives to every person a sufficient trial; for *he is not willing that any should perish*, but *had rather that all should come to repentance*. We may therefore assure ourselves, that he will not cease to endeavour to promote the reformation of a sinner by all proper means, until he shall become absolutely incorrigible, and the methods taken to reclaim him would be abused and lost. And if we consider that every means of improvement neglected adds to a man's guilt, and aggravates

his condemnation, it may even appear to be mercy in the Divine Being to grant a person no farther means of improvement, after it has been found, by actual trial, that they would only have been abused, and therefore have proved highly injurious to him. Not but that it might have been sufficient to silence every cavil of this kind, to say, as Paul does, on a similar occasion, *Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?* or with Abraham, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do that which is right?* But it is proper to shew that *in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy.*

There is a very pathetic description of the case of a sinner who, after a relapse into vicious courses, is justly abandoned of God, to seek his own destruction, in a parable of our Saviour's, formed upon the popular opinion of the Jews of his age concerning demons, or evil spirits, Matt. xii. 43, &c. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a "man, he walketh through dry places, seeking "rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will "return to my house from whence I came out; "and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, "and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with "himself seven other spirits, more wicked than "himself, and they enter in, and dwell there, and

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"the last state of that man is worse than the first." The application of this parable either to the case of the Jews (for whom it seems to have been originally intended) or to particular persons, who, after a seeming reformation, have relapsed into vicious courses, is too obvious to be particularly dwelt upon.

To come, therefore, to a general application of this doctrine, let all persons who are sensible of the folly and evil of sinful courses, and of the danger of persisting in them, make a speedy and effectual retreat. Let us do nothing by halves. To be lukewarm in religion, is in effect to have no religion at all. We must *give God our hearts;* we must give him an undivided affection; for *we cannot truly love God and mammon*, or the world, at the same time. In this unsettled and fluctuating disposition, temptations will have a great advantage over us. We shall ever be in danger of throwing off all restraint, and of running into every kind of riot and excess, 'till nothing on the part of the divine providence shall occur to reclaim us.

In reality, my brethren, and to every valuable end and purpose, the term of our trial and probation does generally expire long before the term of our natural lives. For how few are there whose

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characters, whose *dispositions*, or *habits of mind*, undergo any considerable change after they are grown to man's estate? Our *tempers*, and general characters are usually fixed as soon as we have fixed ourselves in a regular employment and mode of life. For, after this, we see almost every person continue the very same to the end of his life. Some remarkable providential occurrence, some fit of sickness, or some unforeseen misfortune of any kind, may alarm those who have been addicted to vicious courses, and for a time bring them to serious thought and reflexion; but if they be turned thirty or forty years of age, how soon do the serious purposes, which they then form, go off, and their former modes of thinking and living return? Not only with respect to *temper*, and *disposition of mind*, as it relates to virtue or vice, but with respect those habits which are indifferent to morals, we see that, excepting one case perhaps in a thousand, they are not subject to change after the period that I have mentioned. Any habits that we contract early in life, any particular bias or inclination; any particular cast of thought, or mode of conversation: even any particular gesture of body, as in walking, sitting, &c. we are universally known by among our acquaintance, from the time

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that we properly *enter life* to the time that we have done with it; as much as we are by the tone of our voice, or our hand-writing, which likewise are of the nature of *habits*, or *customs*.

These observations may be applied in a great measure even to matters of *opinion*, (though, naturally, nothing seems to be more variable) as well as to mental and corporeal *habits*. A man who has studied, or who fancies he has studied, any particular subject, sooner or later *makes up his mind*, as we say, with respect to it; and after this, all arguments, intended to convince him of his mistake, only serve to confirm him in his chosen way of thinking. An argument, or evidence of any kind, that is entirely *new* to a man, may make a proper impression upon him; but if it has been often proposed to him, and he has had time to view and consider it, so as to have hit upon any method of evading the force of it, he is afterwards quite callous to it, and can very seldom be prevailed upon to give it any proper attention. This consideration accounts, in some measure, both for the great influence of christianity on its first publication, when the doctrines were *new* and *striking*, and also for the absolute indifference with which the same great truths are now heard in all christian countries.

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It accounts also for the more striking effect of the preaching of the methodists than ours. They find people utterly ignorant, to whom the truths, the promises, and the threatenings, of the gospel are really *new*; whereas we have to do with persons who have heard them from their infancy, and have, alas, acquired a habit of disregarding them. But then our people, having, in general, been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes of character and conduct are less necessary in their case. It is to be regretted, however, that they too seldom exceed that mediocrity of character which they acquire in early life. I speak of the generality among us. For others are remarkable exceptions, persons of *disinterested and heroic virtue*, in full proportion to the superior advantages which they enjoy.

The resistance which the mind makes to the admission of truth, when it has been strongly prejudiced against it, is evident both with respect to the belief of christianity in general, and of particular opinions relating to it. There are many persons, by no means defective with respect to *judgment* in other things, of whose conversion to christianity we can have no more reasonable expectation, than of the sun rising in the west, even though they should

should consent to hear, or read, every thing that we could propose to them for that purpose. There are also many conscientious and intelligent roman catholics, absurd as we justly think their principles to be, who would deliberately read the best defences of protestantism, without any other effect than that of being more confirmed in their prejudices against it. The same may be said of persons professing other modes of faith; so that their persuasions are not to be changed, except by such a method as that which was applied for the conversion of the apostle Paul. The same observation may also be applied to many opinions, and especially to a *general bias*, or *turn of thinking*, in matters of a political nature, and even in subjects of philosophy, or criticism.

Facts of this kind, of which we are all witnesses, and which come within the observation of every day in our lives, shew in a very striking light, what care we ought to take in forming our *first judgments* of things, and in contracting our *first habits*, and therefore deserve the more especial attention of *young persons*. For we see that when these *principles* and *habits* are once properly formed, they are generally fixed for life. Whatever is fact with respect to *mankind in general*, we ought

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to conclude to be the case with respect to *ourselves*; that the cause is in the constitution of our *common nature*, and dependent upon the fundamental laws of it, and, no doubt a wise and useful part of it; and we must not expect that *miracles* will be wrought in our favour.

To shew that there is the greatest advantage, as well as some inconvenience, resulting from this *disposition to fixity*, as we call it, in our own nature, let it be observed, that if there was nothing *fixed*, or *permanent*, in the *human character*, we should find the same inconvenience, as if any other law of nature was unsettled. We should be perpetually at a loss how to conduct ourselves, how to behave to mankind in general, and even to our own particular friends and acquaintance, especially after having been for any space of time absent from them. We do not expect to find persons the very same in all changes of condition or circumstances, as in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, &c. but then we generally know what *kind of change* to expect in them in those circumstances, and we regulate our conduct towards them by our experience of the usual effect of similar changes.

These observations, when applied to *opinions*, may serve to amuse us, but when they are applied

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to *practice* they ought seriously to alarm us. Let all those, therefore, who, being at all advanced in life, see reason to be dissatisfied with themselves, with their disposition of mind, and their general conduct, be alarmed; for there is certainly the greatest reason for it, probably much more than they are themselves aware of. Persons in this state of mind always flatter themselves with a time when they shall have more leisure for repentance and reformation; but, judging from observation on others, which is the surest guide that they can follow (infinitely better than their own imaginations) they may conclude, that it is almost a certain that such a time will never come.

If they should have the *leisure* for repentance and reformation which they promised themselves, it is not probable that sufficient *strength of resolution* will come along with it. Indeed, all resolutions to repent at a future time are necessarily insincere, and must be a mere deception; because they imply a preference of a man's present habits and conduct, that he is really *unwilling* to change them, and that nothing but necessity would lead him to make any attempt of the kind. In fact, he can only mean that he will discontinue *particular actions*, his *habits*, or *temper of mind*, remaining the same.

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Besides, a real, effectual repentance, or reformation, is such a total change in a man, as cannot, in the nature of things, take place in a short space of time. A man's habits are formed by the scenes he has gone through, and the impressions which they have made upon him; and when death approaches, a man has not another life, like this, to live over again. He may, even on a death-bed, most sincerely *wish* that he had a pious and benevolent disposition, with the love of virtue in all its branches: but that *wish*, though it be ever so sincere, and earnest, can no more produce a proper change in his mind, than it can restore him to health, or make him taller, or stronger, than he is.

The precise time when this confirmed state of mind takes place, or, in the language of scripture, the time when any person is thus *left of God*, or *left to himself*, cannot be determined. It is necessarily various and uncertain. But in general, we may say, that when any person has been long abandoned to vicious courses, when vice is grown into a habit with him, and especially, when his vices are more properly of *a mental nature*, such as a disposition to *envy*, *malice*, or *selfishness* (which are the most inveterate, the most difficult to be eradicated, of all vices); when neither health nor sickness, prosperity

prosperity nor adversity; when neither a man's own reflexions, the remonstrances of his friends, nor admonitions from the pulpit, have any visible effect upon him; when, after this, we see no great change in his worldly affairs, or connexions, but he goes on from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, without any sensible alteration, there is reason to fear that he is fallen into this *fatal security*, that he is, as it were, *fallen asleep*, and that this sleep will be *the sleep of death*.

However, a shadow of hope is not to be despised. One chance in a thousand is still a chance; and there are persons whose vigour of mind is such, that, when sufficiently rouzed, they are equal to almost any thing. Let those, therefore, who see their danger at any time of life, be *up and doing, working out their salvation with fear and trembling, that*, if possible, *they may flee from the wrath to to come*.

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DISCOURSE

ON THE

RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

1 Cor. XV. 20.

WE cannot imagine any question more interesting to man, than whether he shall survive the grave, so that he shall live, and especially live for ever, after he has been dead. Every question relating to our condition *here* is of no moment at all when compared to this.

Nothing that we see in nature can lead us to form any such expection. I say *expectation*. For though some appearances may lead us to indulge a *wish*, and in some persons perhaps encourage a *hope*, of another life after this, yet if we were left to the mere light of nature, it would remain improba-

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ble upon the whole; so that we could not, in this situation, die with any reasonable prospect of living again.

The constitution of man very much resembles that of other animals. They have the same senses of body, and the same faculties of mind, differing from us only in *degree;* man being more intelligent than they, and therefore capable of greater refinement in his passions and affections, and having greater comprehension of mind, so as to take into his view more of the past, and of the future, together with the present, than they can. This, however, amounts to no difference in *kind;* and the difference that we see among other animals in these respects, is as great as that which subsists between us and the highest of them, the oyster, for example, and the elephant. Consequently, it would be natural to conclude that one fate awaits us all, the superior kinds of animals as well as the inferior, and man as well as them all. When we die, we are equally subject to corruption, and a total dissolution of the parts of which we consist, without any appearance of their ever being re-assembled, and re-arranged as they were before, or of any other Being, in a new form, resulting from them. Death is a

is a great veil, which no man can draw aside, and beyond which all is darkness.

But were it possible, by the force of any reasoning, to discover the *probability* of a future state (and few persons will pretend that they can, by the light of nature, arrive at *certainty* with respect to it) the reasons, whatever they were, that made so great an event probable to one, might give no satisfaction to another.

Besides, the magnitude of the question is such, and the interest we have in the solution of it is so great, that nothing but the strongest and clearest evidence could give general satisfaction with respect to it. Nothing less than a positive assurance from our maker himself could answer this purpose. And this (which, if any thing could be said to require it, did so) revelation informs us has been given, and in such a manner as must give entire satisfaction to every unprejudiced mind, *life and immortality being fully brought to light by the gospel*, as I hope to evince in the prosecution of this discourse.

It could not be expected that the Divine Being should give this assurance to every individual of the human race. It would be sufficient if it was given to some, to be communicated, with proper evidence

evidence of the fact, to others; and unless the communication was made to every person, this is all that could be done in the case. For this truth is of such a nature as to be incapable of strict, or mathematical, demonstration, such as that of *twice two* making *four*, but only of such proof as *historical facts* are capable of. But the evidence of a future state should not be undervalued on that account; because there are no kinds of truth of which we have a more firm persuasion than of those of the historical kind; as for example, that such a person as Julius Cæsar once lived at Rome, and that there exists at present such a city as Constantinople. What propositions do we believe more firmly than we do these? Now if our faith in a future life can be shewn to be as well founded as these are, it is quite sufficient for the purpose; because it will be a faith that men will not scruple to *act* upon. They would then live as expectants of immortality, and would do nothing that should imply a doubt of a future state. That is, they would lead virtuous lives, which is the end of all religion.

In what manner God was pleased to impart to mankind the first information concerning a future life we are not now acquainted, as we have no ac-

count of it in the writings of Moses, or in any other writings now extant. But we see the *effect* of it in the Jews, who to this day are all firm believers in it; and, with a few exceptions, appear always to have believed in it. We may, therefore, presume that, in some period of time past, mankind, or at least the ancestors of that nation, had satisfactory evidence of the Divine Being having given them this assurance. Because it is an idea that we cannot well suppose would ever have occurred to men themselves.

That there may be something in man that continues to exist, notwithstanding the change that takes place in him at death, *may* be imagined. But, upon that principle, man cannot be said properly to *die* at all. He only continues to exist in some other form or manner. But that man should really *die*, and after continuing in a state of death, come to life again at a future period, that is, that there should be a proper *resurrection of the dead*, which is the faith of the Jews, and Christians (being, I must now presume, the clear doctrine of both the Old and the New Testament) I will venture to say must ever have appeared in the highest degree improbable, and therefore incredible. Nothing but the express assurance of the Great Being who made

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men could have satisfied them that he would revive them in those circumstances.

The original record of the communication of this most important truth having been lost, it pleased the Divine Being to renew it by Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion; who not only asserted the doctrine, as from God, and confirmed it by miracles, or such works as no man could have done if God had not been with him; but who himself actually died and rose again, as a proof of the reality of the thing. And this seems to have been all the evidence that mankind could have asked, if the most intelligent, and the most incredulous of them, had been required to say what would satisfy them.

As Jesus rested the evidence of his divine mission, and consequently his authority to preach the doctrine of a future life, in a more particular manner upon his own resurrection from the dead; and as, in all cases, examples have the greatest weight with mankind, I shall confine myself at this time to the consideration of the circumstances of his death and resurrection, shewing them to have been such as render those important events in the highest degree credible, both at the time when they took place; and, which is of much more conse-

quence, in all future time. So that, had mankind, not only in that period, but in the most distant ages, been required to name the evidence that would give them the most satisfaction, it will appear that it has been given them; and that, in any other circumstances than the actual ones, the events would have appeared less credible than they do at present.

In the first place, however, I would briefly premise, that Jesus Christ was not only an uncommon man, but an uncommon prophet, the circumstances in which he appeared having been calculated to excite greater attention to him than to any other person who had ever appeared in that character; his coming having been announced some centuries before his birth; another prophet having been commissioned to declare his more immediate appearance, and no other prophet having appeared for near four hundred years before his immediate predecessor.

This circumstance alone, independently of any others, shews that the Jews, among whom Jesus appeared, were not a credulous nation. For if this had been the case, as they are well known to have been very proud of having had prophets among them, there would have been, in so long a period,

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many false pretensions to prophecy; whereas in all that time there does not appear to have been any pretension of this kind. Nay the whole history of the Jews shews that, if any nation was to have been chosen for a theatre of prophecy, none could have been so proper for the purpose as that of the Jews; because they appear to have been the least credulous, more disposed to reject, than eagerly to receive, any prophets that were sent to them, Moses himself, the great pride of their nation, least of all excepted. They were ever fond of the ceremonies and religious rites of their neighbours, but always ready to reject their own, till repeatedly brought back to the observance of them by the severest judgments.

Besides, though a great prophet, under the denomination of *the Messiah*, was expected by the body of the Jewish nation, the idea they had universally conceived of him was such, that, though Jesus truly bore that character, he was, in fact, such a person as they were least likely to receive in it. Their idea of the Messiah was that of *a king* and *a conqueror*, to which Jesus made no pretensions. Nothing, therefore, but the most overbearing evidence could be expected to induce any Jew to receive in that character one who disclaimed all

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worldly honours, and who left his nation in the abject condition in which he found it. I will venture to say we have no example in history of any national prejudice so deeply rooted as this among the Jews, of their Messiah being to be a temporal prince, destined to rescue their nation from servitude, and to make them the most distinguished people upon the face of the earth. It is found among all the Jews, in all parts of the world, to this very day. No time, or calamities, seem capable of extinguishing it. Evidence, therefore, that could subdue such a prejudice as this, in any considerable number of *Jews*, must have been of the most satisfactory kind.

In this nation did Jesus appear, after being announced by John the Baptist, who, to draw the more attention upon him, solemnly baptized those who received his doctrine, the chief article of which was the speedy approach of another prophet much greater than himself. An audible voice from heaven was the token by which John knew that Jesus was the person whom he was sent to precede, for they had no previous knowledge of each other. Accordingly, John referred all his disciples to Jesus, thereby transferring to him, as far as it was in his power, all the popularity that he himself had acquired,

quired, which appears to have been very great with the nation in general. This, I would observe by the way, sufficiently proves that John was no impostor, or one who sought any thing for himself.

Jesus, thus announced, preached publicly, working numberless miracles, the reality of which was never called into question, especially healing all manner of diseases, and raising at least three persons, but probably more, from the dead. Bnt the morality which he taught was so strict, and his appearance so unassuming, that the generality of his countrymen would not receive him in the character of their promised Messiah. Many, however, who attended him more closely, had no doubt of this. But even these persons were so fixed in the popular belief that the Messiah was to be a king, that they were persuaded he only waited a proper opportunity to assume that character; and when he was put to death without doing it, all their hopes were disappointed, and they evidently had no farther expectations from him, notwithstanding they never entertained the idea of his being an impostor.

While Jesus lived his followers were numerous, and twelve of them constantly attended him, so that his person could not but have been perfectly well known

known to them, and to these he repeatedly appeared after his death, so as finally to leave no doubt on any of their minds, that he was the same person who had been put to death.

I shall now dwell a little on those circumstances which tend to give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, and reply to some objections which have been made to it. After this I shall shew that this historical evidence of the truth of *revealed religion* proves the truth of *natural religion*, and conclude with a practical application of the doctrine.

In the first place I shall consider the circumstances which give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. His death was not private, among his friends, but in public, and accomplished by his enemies, who, we may be sure, would not leave their own great purpose unfinished, when it was in their power completely to effect it. This we cannot doubt to have been the principal reason, in the plan of divine providence, why Jesus was executed as a criminal, in consequence of the sentence of a public court of justice. After this, no reasonable doubt could be entertained of the reality of his death. Accordingly, it does not appear that any

doubt

doubt was entertained of it at the time, by those who were the best judges, and who were, at the same time, the most interested to dispute the fact. And this is all that we can reasonably require at this day.

It is true that Jesus expired sooner than other persons usually did in the same circumstances. But this might be owing to his having a more delicate constitution, but especially to his having been so much exhausted by his severe agony in the garden the preceding night; an agony which affected him so much that it would not have been extraordinary if he had actually died in consequence of it: since such consternation and terror as he appears to have been in is well known to have been, of itself, the cause of death to many persons.

The death of Jesus was so evident to the soldiers who attended the execution, and who, no doubt (being used to the business) were sufficient judges of the signs of death, that, concluding him to be actually dead, they did not break his bones, as they did those of the other persons who were executed along with him. One of them, however, did what was fully equivalent to it; for he thrust a spear into his side, so that blood and water evidently flowed out of the wound. Now though we may be at a loss

a loss to account for the *water*, it was certainly impossible so to pierce the body as that *blood* should visibly and instantly flow from the wound, without piercing either the heart itself, or some large blood vessel, the rupture of which would have been mortal.

After this, Jesus was taken down from the cross, was swathed in spices, as the bodies of persons of distinction among the Jews usually were, was left in that state, without any appearance of life, deposited in a cold sepulchre, where he could have no assistance to bring him to life if any remains of life had been in him. Can we then have any doubt of Jesus having been unquestionably dead, when both friends and enemies had no doubt at the time on the subject.

2. The circumstances of the re-appearing of Jesus after his crucifixion were such, as were calculated to give the greatest satisfaction possible. The first of them were made when, it is evident, his disciples had no expectation whatever of any such event, so that they could not have been imposed upon by their fond imaginations. For though Jesus had plainly apprized his disciples that he was to be put to death, and that he should rise again on the third day, they had so fixed a persuasion

suasion that he was to be a great king, and consequently not to die at all, that they probably concluded (as he had been used to speak to them in figurative language) that by *death* he only meant some trial, or calamity, and that therefore by a *resurrection* he meant his emerging from it. But whatever their ideas were, it is most evident from the history that they had no expectation either of his death, or of his resurrection, and that his death only filled them with consternation and despair, and did not at all lead them to expect his resurrection.

After Jesus had appeared in this unexpected manner to several of his disciples, viz. to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, to the ten who were assembled in the evening of the same day at Jerusalem, and probably to Peter, also, he appointed a time and place when he would meet them all, at a sufficient distance from the time of his speaking. Consequently, if any doubts remained on the minds of any of them, they had time to consider what satisfaction they required; and might, of course, be prepared to get that satisfaction, which it is evident he never refused them, even offering himself to be handled, and examined by them at their leisure, and eating and drinking along with them. Indeed the marks of

crucifixion on his hands and feet, and the wound in his side, were abundantly sufficient to identify his person. What is recorded concerning Thomas was probably the case of many others; nor did his incredulity exceed that of the rest, though he expressed it in a stronger manner; and the satisfaction that Jesus gave to Thomas, he was, no doubt, as ready to give to any others of them.

3. The appearances were sufficiently frequent, viz. four times on the day of resurrection, first to Mary Magdalene, then to Peter, then to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, then to the ten in the absence of Thomas, and afterwards to all the eleven. In Galilee he first appeared unexpectedly to Peter, John, and a few others, and then to more than five hundred at once. This must have been the great meeting by appointment, though particularly mentioned by Paul only. Another time he appeared to James, called his brother, or near relation, then to all the disciples (who were more than an hundred) residing at Jerusalem, when he went with them to the mount of Olives, and at leisure ascended above the clouds in their sight. Though these are all the appearances that are particularly recorded, there were probably many more, for no one writer has mentioned all these, not even

Paul,

Paul, who seems to have intended to recite all that he could recollect at that time. None of these appearances, I would also observe, were at midnight, when persons, suddenly awaking from sleep, have not the perfect use of their senses and judgment; but in the day; not at a distance, but quite near; and not transient, but of a sufficient length of time.

Surely, then, we are authorized to say that, as far as *numbers* were requisite to give evidence concerning any particular event, these were quite sufficient. For if the evidence of five hundred would not remove the doubts of any persons, neither would that of five thousand, or of any number whatever. They were also persons who had every character of unexceptionable witnesses, as they cannot be supposed to have been deceived themselves, or to have had any motive to wish to impose upon others; because they had no interest in doing it.

4. The appearances were continued to a sufficient period, viz. the space of forty days, which was certainly time enough for any persons to recollect themselves, to get over any impression of surprize, and to be perfectly collected, so as to be put upon their guard against any cause of deception, and to examine and satisfy themselves at their full leisure.

Such is the direct evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, than which nothing can well be conceived to be stronger, resting upon the testimony of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses, not prepossessed in favour of an *expected* event, and who yet had time to recover from the surprize occasioned by an *unexpected* one. It was also a testimony to which they all adhered through life, notwithstanding the greatest temptation that men could lie under to tell a different story.

I shall now consider some objections that have been made to this evidence.

1st. It has been said that Jesus ought to have continued longer in a state of death, as till the body had putrified, &c. so that the revival of it might have been the more extraordinary. In this view, no doubt, the evidence of a proper resurrection might have been made more striking. But then, though the evidence would have gained strength in one way, it would, by this very means, have lost much more in another. Not to say that a resurrection from any state of unquestionable death, is as much a proof of a real miracle, as from any other state. That is, it required nothing less than a *divine power*, which is undoubtedly equal to the raising a man from death at any period, as well as the making of any number of new men.

But

But had the resurrection of Jesus been at any considerable distance of time, the evidence of his *death*, and consequently that of a miracle in his *resurrection*, had not been so clear. For then it might have been said that, in so long time, he might have recovered from the effect of a seeming death; that his disciples had time to recover from their consternation, and lay their schemes for any particular purpose; that, in so long an interval, the guard of the sepulchre might have been more negligently kept, the seal on the stone might have been broken by some accident, and Jesus, being alive, might have been conveyed away, and time given for his appearance, as raised from the dead.

But considering that Jesus was taken down from the cross, to all appearance at least dead, and left in the state of a corpse, swathed in spices, late on Friday evening, and then left alone, in a cold sepulchre, it was absolutely impossible, whatever life may be supposed to have remained in him, that he should have appeared not only alive, but in perfect health and vigour, walking about, and conversing, as if nothing at all had been done to him, so early as at day break on the Sunday following. In the evening of that day he walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was about

eight miles, and also back again, and as speedily as two men in health, and who made all the haste they could, were able to do the same. This is the more extraordinary, considering the wounds that had been made in the *feet* of Jesus. If a man had suffered nothing more than this piercing of his feet, in the rough manner in which it was, no doubt, done in the act of crucifixion, this walk alone would have been absolutely impossible; and on the third day he would have been even less able to walk than on the first, from the inflammation of the wounds. There must, therefore, have been some miracle in the case; and if any miracle was performed, why not that of a real resurrection?

It may be said that the evidence of a real miracle would have been still stronger, if the bones of Jesus had been broken, like those of the two thieves. But as the piercing of his feet, the wound in his side, and even the hanging so long on the cross, must have effectually incapacitated him from walking abroad within two days, the breaking of his bones would have made no real addition to the evidence; the *impossibility* of his walking abroad being really the same in both cases. There would have been a difference only in the

the case of *probabilities*, which vary with circumstances. But any one natural and absolute *impossibility* furnishes as strong an argument as another.

In this very important view, therefore, the less was the time that intervened between Jesus' having been laid in the sepulchre, and his appearance alive and well out of it, the stronger is the evidence of a divine interposition, and unbelievers would have had more to object if that interval had been longer, than they can have at present. Jesus, we can now say, appeared alive and well sooner than it was *possible*, in the ordinary course of nature, that he could have done. It was before the guard could have been relaxed, before the disciples could have recovered from their consternation; and especially before it was possible for him to have recovered from the languishing state in which crucifixion must have left any man; to say nothing of the wound he had received in his side, which alone, if it had missed any vital part, must have confined him, and have disabled him from going abroad, a very long time.

2d. It may be proper to take some notice of the story that was propagated by the Jewish priests, who, when the guard fled at the appearance of the angel and the earthquake, bade them say that *the*

disciples of Jesus came by night, and stole him away while they slept. This, however, was both in the highest degree improbable, and what is more, it would not have answered any purpose; so that they who had just before behaved in the most cowardly manner possible, must have risqued their lives for nothing. Indeed, such a story as this would hardly have been suggested by the enemies of christianity, if any thing had been known at the time besides the earthquake, the appearance of the angel, and a suspicion, perhaps a report, of the absence of the body, and if any thing had occured to them more plausible at the time. So weak a defence almost amounts to a confession of the weakness of the cause to be supported by it.

The improbability alone of any considerable number of men all sleeping, whose business it was to keep awake, and not more than two or three hours, for which they had time enough to prepare themselves by sleeping the preceding part of the night (for this was the last watch, at break of day) and when the penalty of sleeping was death; and that they should all sleep so soundly, as that the rolling of al arge stone (so large that several women despaired of being able to move it) and this quite near to them, should not awake any one of them, is far too great to be admitted.

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The disciples of Jesus, if such a scheme had come into their minds, dispirited and dispersed as they were, could have had no expectation of accomplishing it *undiscovered*, even if there had been no guard at the sepulchre. The city of Jerusalem was at that time full of people, beyond any thing that we can have an idea of at present, being the time of passover, and when the moon was at the full, so that numbers of people (the houses of the city not being sufficient to receive them) would be walking about at all hours; and the sepulchre was so near to the city, that it is now inclosed within the walls. In that climate, and at that time of the year, there was no inconvenience in passing the whole night, and even sleeping in the open air. The preceding night Jesus and his disciples had passed in a neighbouring garden; and it is very probable that they had done the same before, since Judas expected to find them there. In these circumstances, the disciples could not have had any reasonable expectation of removing the body undiscovered.

Besides, what would the removal of a mere corpse, admitting that they might have had the courage, and address, to succeed in so unpromising an attempt, have availed them. There would

have been no evidence of a *resurrection*, unless the dead man could have been exhibited alive, which it was certainly out of their power to do.

If a few of the disciples of Jesus had been so abandoned, and at the same time so stupid, as to have attempted an imposition of this kind, an imposition from which they could not have derived any imaginable advantage, how could they have made others believe a resurrection of which they saw no evidence? Would the mere absence of the body have satisfied Thomas (who, though one of the twelve, was certainly not in the secret) the five hundred who went by appointment into Galilee, or the thousands who were converted by Peter immediately after this event; and would none of them have abandoned so groundless a faith in time of persecution? Would not torture, and the prospect of death, have extorted a confession of the cheat from some of those who were in the secret.

Lastly, what prospect could the disciples of Jesus have had of being able to carry on the scheme that was begun by their master, without his power of working miracles, of which they must have known themselves to be destitute. It was, no doubt, the possession of this power, and this alone, that emboldened them, disappointed and dispirited

ed as they had been before, to persist in the same scheme, and without this they would certainly have absconded, and have been no more heard of. They were neither orators nor warriors, and therefore were destitute of all the natural means of success.

3. The objection that has been urged in the strongest manner, and to which I must, therefore, give the more particular attention, is, that, after his resurrection, Jesus should have appeared as publicly as he had done before his death, and especially in the presence of his judges, and of his enemies. This, they say, would have satisfied them, and the whole country, and of course all the world, so that no doubt would have remained on the subject.

But the resurrection of Jesus himself might not have conciliated those who were only the more exasperated at the resurrection of Lazarus, at which themselves were present, from whatever source their obstinacy and incredulity arose. The whole story, how well soever attested, might have been laughed at in Greece and at Rome, where the Jews and every thing relating to them, were, without any examination into the subject, held in the greatest contempt. Besides, there would have been a want of dignity, and an appearance of insult, unworthy

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of our Saviour's character, in thus ostentatiously exhibiting himself before his enemies, and as it were mocking at their attempts to kill him.

I would farther observe, that though Jesus did not appear to *all* his enemies, he did appear to *one* of them, and one whom no person will doubt to have been as prejudiced, and as inveterate, as any of them, viz. Paul. Now, as *this* enemy of christianity was convinced of the truth of the resurrection, by Jesus appearing to him in person, we cannot doubt but that, if it had suited the plan of divine providence, *all* the Jews might have been convinced by the same means, and have become christians.

But admitting that the consequence of such a public appearance of Jesus would have been the conviction of all that country, and of all that age, it would have been an unfavourable circumstance with respect to the evidence at this distance of time, and still more so in remoter ages. And the great object certainly was, that this important event should be so circumstanced, as that it should preserve its credit unimpaired to the end of time.

If we suppose that mankind in the most distant ages of the world had been asked, what kind of evidence would satisfy *them*, with respect to the reality

ty of an event which took place several thousand years before they were born, they would certainly say; that, to give satisfaction to *them* who had no opportunity of examining into the fact themselves, it should have been so circumstanced, as that besides a sufficient number of persons attesting the truth of it, friends and enemies, believers and unbelievers, should clearly appear to have been sufficiently *interested* to examine into the truth, while the fact was *recent*, and therefore while it was in their power to investigate it thoroughly. And this could only be in circumstances in which some should believe and others not, and in which the believers should have every temptation to renounce their belief, and their enemies every motive to detect the imposture. But this could not have been the case if the resurrection of Jesus had been universally believed at the time, or in that age, and consequently there had been no early persecution of christians.

In these circumstances, it might have been said by unbelievers in remote ages, that, as no opposition was made to the progress of christianity, it did not appear to them that the reality of those facts on which the belief of it is founded had been sufficiently enquired into at the time, that it might have been

been found convenient (for reasons now unknown, and at this distance inscrutable) to make a change in the religion of the country, and that, as the rulers of it adopted the measure, it might, for any thing that appeared, have been originally a scheme of *theirs*; and that when the governors of any country interest themselves to promote any measure, it is always in their power to impose upon the vulgar: that private orders, for example, might have been given, that Jesus, though suspended on a cross, should not be much hurt; that the sepulchre, being under ground, might have proper apartments adjoining to it, where there might be every accommodation that was requisite for his complete recovery and refreshment; and that a few leading persons being in the secret, the rest might be imposed upon to believe the story of a resurrection, or any thing else.

Thus the origin of christianity, it might have been said, did not materially differ from that of the several species of heathenism or Mahometanism, which the people first believed without any proper enquiry, and to which their descendants adhered because they had been received by their ancestors before them.

But the circumstances attending the actual promulgation

mulgation of christianity were such, as that nothing of this kind can ever be advanced by any unbelievers, at all acquainted with the history of the times; because it is evident, that Jesus Christ, and his religion, and especially the account of his resurrection, on which the whole of it hinged, immediately engaged the closest attention of great numbers, and that thousands felt themselves interested in the highest degree to examine into the truth of it.

In the first place, the apostles, and other primitive christians, were certainly interested not to give up their ease, their little fortunes, and their lives, for an idle tale. And, on the other hand, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, who had been so much exasperated at Jesus as to procure his death, even with some risque to themselves, from his popularity with the common people, would feel themselves more strongly interested to suppress his followers, and his religion, after his death, and this they evidently did, without losing any time in the business.

Not more than fifty days elapsed between the crucifixion of Jesus and the most open publication of the account of his resurrection, an event spoken of even before his death, against any imposition with respect to which all possible precautions had been

been taken, and concerning which many rumors must have prevailed from the passover to pentecost (for no secrecy was enjoined with respect to it) from the very day of his appearance. On the day of Pentecost, however, it was boldly asserted by such a number of persons, who were witnesses of the fact, that some thousands (who had themselves seen the miracles of Jesus) were fully convinced of its truth, and gave public testimony of their faith by being immediately baptized.

Observe in how full and explicit a manner Peter, on this occasion, gave his testimony, Acts ii. 22. *Ye men of Israel, hear my words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all* (and about one hundred and twenty were then with him) *are witnesses.*

The boldness of the apostles in giving this public testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, a testimony which his audience evidently could not contradict, exasperated the rulers of the country to the highest degree; and the event being then recent, they would, no doubt, do every thing that men in power,

power, could do in order to discover the cheat, if any such had been used.

This endeavour to suppress christianity began in the very country, and in the very city, in which it was first promulgated, where Jesus had always appeared in public, and consequently where himself, and all that he had done, were known to thousands. And this violent opposition, than which we know of nothing in the history of mankind more violent, and which began as early as it was possible for it to begin, was continued by the Jews, with very few interruptions, till it was taken up by the Romans, who were alarmed at the rapid spread of the new religion, which soon appeared to be hostile to all the old ones, on the observance of which it was universally imagined that the temporal prosperity of states depended. And this persecution of christianity did not end till about three hundred years after its promulgation, that is, till all farther scrutiny into the facts was equally impossible and needless.

Did not this situation of things most strongly invite all persons to make the most rigorous inquiry into the truth of the facts on which christianity was founded, and especially that of the resurrection of Jesus? Would not all the five hundred as long

long as they lived (and according to Paul many of them were living in the year 52, and the apostle John, it is supposed, did not die till about A. D. 90.) be continually speaking of it, and examined concerning it? This would certainly be the case if any such event had happened at this day, and human nature, we cannot doubt to have been the same in all ages.

What, then, could any of those who are now unbelievers in christianity have done, if they had been living at the time of the promulgation of it, more than other unbelievers then did, who, whatever else they might do, or say, could not discover any marks of imposture. No other facts in the whole compass of history, we may safely venture to assert, ever underwent a thousandth part of the investigation that, from the nature of the circumstances, *these* must have done; and, what is of particular consequence, at the time when the investigation was the most easy.

Though Jesus did not appear in public after his resurrection, the miracle of *the descent of the holy Spirit*, enabling the apostles and other disciples to speak intelligibly languages which they had not been taught, and also many other miracles wrought by them, were as public as possible; and every miracle

miracle wrought by the apostles was, in fact, a proof of the resurrection of their master. If his mission, confirmed by, and implying the truth of, his resurrection, was not from God, neither was theirs; for both were part of the same scheme, and therefore they imply one another.

Thus our faith does not rest on the testimony of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who wrote the history of Christ, and of the promulgation of christianity. We have, in fact, the testimony of the age in which they lived, to the great events recorded by them. These books, or ever so many of the same nature, could never have been received, and transmitted to us, as authentic histories, in the circumstances that I have described, if the contents of them could have been questioned.

The inconsistencies that we discover in the accounts of the four evangelists imply no defect in the evidence; being no greater than are usually found in the narratives of any important event written by different persons; who will always attend chiefly to what is most essential to the story, and less to the minute circumstances of it; and these narratives were all written a considerable time after the event. But the most important consideration

is, that these histories were not the cause of the belief of the resurrection of Jesus, but were themselves among the consequences of that belief, the proper evidence having produced its full effect long before they were written; so that it could not have been deficient in any material respect.

That all mankind were not immediately convinced of the truth of christianity may be sufficiently accounted for; as, from the little interest that great numbers take in any thing relating to *religion;* from the aversion which the greatest part of mankind have to examine into any thing that is *new*, when it is hostile to that which is *old*, and their listening to any idle tales to the prejudice of those who teach it, which we see every day. And if the powerful, the learned, and the polite, whose prejudices, especially against any thing that originates with the *illiterate*, are well known to be as strong as any prejudices whatever, would not read or think seriously on the subject (which was evidently the case with the generality of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and other persons of distinction at that time) many would be influenced by their example, and join in a blind opposition to what

what they had never considered, from imagining that it was not worth their while to consider it.

Besides all this, we are to consider the great numbers who were, directly or indirectly, interested in the support of the old established systems of religion, who would feel themselves exasperated, and, therefore without any inquiry into the merits of the case, would, with all their might, oppose the progress of the new religion. Such would be the case with many persons of eminence and influence; and the lower orders, the mob, might be inflamed by any idle tales. This is nothing more than the common fate of all reformers, and all reformations in matters of religion. It flows from the common principles of human nature, which are the same in all ages, and which operate in the same manner in all similar circumstances.

In this state things continued as long as they possibly could, the friends and the enemies of christianity being equally interested to discover the truth, while the facts were at all recent, and most easy to be investigated; and the new religion established itself gradually, as, if founded on truth, and unaided by power, it naturally would do in such circumstances. The attention of the more dispassionate and disinterested was gradually gain-

ed, and converts were in time made of some men of learning, who were capable of writing in defence of christianity, and whose writings made other converts, both philosophers and others.

At length the converts to christianity in all places, and especially in those that were the nearest to the scene of the transactions, were so numerous, that the old religion sunk into general contempt and neglect; and in less then three hundred years after the promulgation of christianity, we see that, notwithstanding the deep rooted attachment of all the heathen world to the religion of their ancestors, Constantine could safely declare himself a christian, without any apprehension from his competitors, who endeavoured to avail themselves of that circumstance. None of them, however, were able, by this means, to throw any considerable obstacle in his way, and he reigned almost in peace, and a longer time than any of the emperors after Augustus.

This is a clear proof of the preceding spread of christianity, and of the hold which it had got on the minds of the people in general; and this was in the most disadvantageous circumstances that can be imagined, if it had been an imposture. But this most striking evidence of the truth of christianity

nity we could not now have had, if the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus had been such, as to have convinced all the Jews and all the world as soon as he appeared. What had been the most satisfactory to *them* would have been (from the nature of the thing) the least so to *us*.

When the persecution of christianity began, the facts on which it was founded were recent, so that it was in the power of men of sense and inquiry to satisfy themselves concerning them; and we have seen that they were sufficiently interested so to do. But if one whole generation should have been, as we say, *infatuated*, so as to have taken up the belief of these facts without any sufficient reason, the next generation might have been sensible of this, and have made more diligent search (and then it was not too late) and not have thrown away their fortunes and their lives for nothing, as their fathers had done before them. But notwithstanding this, every inquiry continued to make more converts, till, without any aid from power, or from learning in the first instance, the new religion completely established itself on the ruins of the old, and was embraced by persons of all ranks without distinction, the rich and the poor, the philosophers and the vulgar.

If all this could take place without there being any truth in the history of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, it must have been more extraordinary, nay, strictly speaking, more miraculous, than those events themselves. For human nature was the same then, that it is now; and that *men*, such as we now find them to be, should, in the circumstances that I have now described, have been impressed as the early converts to christianity were, that they should have been induced to believe a story which they might easily have discovered to be destitute of all foundation, and have sacrificed so much as they did to their belief, must have been the greatest of all miracles; no natural cause being adequate to such an effect. It must also have been so stupendous a miracle (operating on *the minds of men*, which is more extraordinary than any effect that is apparent to the senses) without any rational end or object. Nay the Divine Being must have wrought this miracle with no other view than to puzzle and confound his creatures, and to involve some of the most deserving of them in the greatest calamities. On the other hand, the miracles which gave birth to christianity had the greatest and noblest of all objects, the instruction and reformation of the world.

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In fact, the proof of christianity supplies the only probable method of accounting for past and present *appearances*, and therefore what a true *philosopher*, whose object it is to inquire into the *causes of things*, will adopt, in preference to any other.

It was, however, you clearly see, of the greatest advantage to the evidence of the truth of christianity in distant ages, that the bulk of the Jewish nation should from the beginning have been hostile to it; while at the same time the belief of such numbers of them, prejudiced as they must all have been against it, is an abundant proof of its truth. But when, by the long continued enmity of the Jews to the christians, it shall be sufficiently evident, that it was no scheme of that nation in general, and that, so far from giving it any aid in its infant state, they discountenanced it as much as it was in their power to do it; if ever they should be converted to christianity, before or after their return to their own country (both which events are foretold in the scriptures) it will be such a clear fulfilment of prophecy, as it seems probable that no power of incredulity will be able to resist; and then, as Paul says, Rom. xi. 15. *If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world,*

what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

I shall conclude this part of my discourse with observing, that the truth of christianity is founded upon plain *facts*, such as any persons who had the use of their senses might be judges of. Opinions of other kinds men may become so fully persuaded of, as even to die for them, as well as christians have done for their religion; but then the *nature* and *ground* of their faith have been different; they having been either misled by an *implicit faith* in persons who they thought could not mislead them, or by *reasoning wrong*. That Mahomet, for example, or Swedenborg, had divine missions, many might be induced to believe on their own confident assertions, having a good opinion of the men; or they might imagine that the conquests of Mahomet and his followers, could not have been so great and so rapid, if his pretensions had not been well founded. But is this such *kind* of evidence as that on which we believe the truth of christianity, which neither requires that implicit faith be given to any person, nor any reasoning, except the plainest of all, viz. that if any person do such works as God only could enable him to do, he must be empowered by God to do them, and the

the evidence of their own senses that such works were done? The truth of christianity rests on the evidence of such visible marks of divine power as the instant curing of the most dangerous disorders, and the raising of persons, and especially of Jesus himself, from a state of actual death, with respect to which men who had only eyes, ears and other natural senses, could not possibly be deceived; whereas no visible miracle of any kind was so much as pretended to by either Mahomet or Swedenborg.

We also see the great difference of the ground of belief in these cases in the *time* that was requisite to produce their effect. Mahomet was several years in persuading any besides a very few persons, particularly connected with him, and who had a prospect of being gainers by his success, of his divine mission, and it was thirteen years before he had followers enough to venture to take the field with them, so as to attack a caravan, to which they were led by the hope of plunder. As to Swedenborg, though he died several years ago, his followers are only just now beginning to make themselves conspicuous. On the contrary, it is evident that Jesus might, if he had been so disposed, have mustered as large an army as he chose within a month

month or two after he appeared in a public character.

Some are so incredulous as to say, that, admitting all the facts recited in the gospel history, viz. that the apostles, and other disciples of Jesus, had no doubt of his resurrection, and that their previous incredulity was overcome by the most satisfactory evidence; yet that it was more probable that their senses, that of feeling, as well as those of seeing and hearing, were repeatedly imposed upon, than that there should have been a proper resurrection of a man who had been dead. But such a deception as this could not have been effected without a miracle, and for what end could such a miracle have been wrought? As it had all the effect of a real resurrection, it is liable to all the same objections, and therefore if the one was produced, the other might be also.

If any person will say either that the appearances recorded in the New Testament are no proofs of a real resurrection, or (which has also been said) that the real resurrection of Jesus would be no proof of his divine mission, and of the truth of his religion, so that we could not thence infer the certainty of our own resurrection, they must be so constituted, as that no evidence whatever can produce

duce that conviction in their minds. The Divine Being himself (and I must in this argument suppose that there is such a Being) could not do it. For all that *he* could do to attest the divine mission of any person could only be his enabling him to work miracles, or to do such things as only he himself, the author of nature, could do. But no person, in the age of the apostles, or any subsequent one, ever believed the facts, and doubted the conclusion; so that the miracles were fully adequate to the purpose of them; and since all men are no doubt constituted alike, the present objectors must be under the influence of a prejudice that nothing can overcome, and must be a case exactly similar to insanity.

I now proceed to shew that the solution of such difficulties as these, respecting the truth of *revealed religion*, may assist those who have similar difficulties with respect to *natural religion*; and all great moral truths have, directly or indirectly, a connexion with each other.

Now it seems to be impossible for any person to be convinced by historical evidence, which is the most intelligible of all evidence whatever, of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, and at the same time to have any doubt of the being

ing and the providence of God, because the one evidently implies the other. If Christ actually wrought miracles, and, after dying, rose from the dead, there must have been a *power* that enabled him so to do; and this must have been an intelligent, or a designing, and a benevolent power, the laws of nature having been changed for great and good purposes.

It is in vain for any person to say, as some however have done, that till we are satisfied with respect to the being of a God, which, in the order of nature, is the first of all religious truths, it is to no purpose to inquire into the evidence of christianity. For though it be most convenient to *teach*, and to *consider*, any system of truths in a certain order, the *discovery* of them is altogether independent of that order. In this case, *the first may be last, and the last first.*

An Englishman, for example, may say, and plausibly enough, that he ought to understand his own country, before he explores any other. But it may happen that he shall be carried to Asia, Africa, or America, before he can have seen much of his own country, and thereby have a better opportunity of exploring *them* than his own. Or, considering the sun as the centre of our system,

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he might fancy that, till we know what that great body is, it is absurd to give much attention to the *planets*, which depend upon it. But in this way he might live and die without acquiring any knowledge of them at all. Even the several propositions in geometry may be learned in a very different order, as the different treatises on that branch of science evince, and yet be all equally well understood at the last. In like manner may men attain to the knowledge of God, and of his providence, without beginning with the study of them.

An atheist is a person who believes that there is no Being who established the present order of nature, but that all things have always been as they now are, and that all deviations from this order are absolutely impossible, and therefore incredible. Consequently, any clear proof of an actual deviation from this order of nature overturns his whole system. The atheist says that, since we must suppose something to have been *uncaused*, we may just as well content ourselves with saying that the present visible system had no cause, as suppose that something still greater than this system, and the cause of it, had no cause; since by ascending higher, we get no nearer to the solution of our great difficulty, viz. the *cause of what exists*. But

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the proof of any miracle is decisively in favour of the actual existence of a power unquestionably above the common course of nature, and different from it. This is no less than a demonstration, that the reasoning of the atheist, however specious, is *in fact* wrong; and that, difficult as it may be to conceive the self-existence, as we say, of a Being greater than the visible universe, such a Being certainly does exist. I shall endeavour to make this argument still plainer by an illustration.

Let a person unacquainted with clocks, watches, and other machines, be introduced into a room containing many of them, all in regular motion. He sees no maker of these machines, and knows nothing of their internal structure; and as he sees them all to move with perfect regularity, he may say, on the principles of the atheistical system, that they are *automata*, or self-moving machines: and so long as all these machines continue in regular motion, and he knows nothing of the making of them, or the winding of them up, this theory may appear plausible.

But let us suppose that, coming into this room again and again, and, always attending to the machines, he shall find one of them much out of order; and at length its motion shall intirely cease;

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but that, after continuing in this state some time, he shall again find it in perfect order, moving as ever. Will he not then conclude that some person, whom he has not seen, but probably the maker of the machines, had been in the room in his absence? The restoration of motion to the disordered machine would impress his mind with the idea of a *maker* of them in a much more forcible manner than his observing the regular construction, and uniform motion of them. It must convince him of the existence of some person capable of *regulating*, and therefore probably of *making*, these machines, whether he should ever see this person or not.

Thus do miracles prove the existence of a God in a shorter and more satisfactory manner than the observation of the uninterrupted course of nature. If there be a Being who can *controul* the course of nature, there must be one who originally *established* it, in whatever difficulty we may still be left with respect to his nature, and the manner of his existence. We are compelled by a greater difficulty to admit a less, though acknowledged to be great. At all events, we see in miracles that there certainly exists a Being superior to ourselves, or any thing that is the object of our senses.

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And thus is demonstrated the wisdom of the general plan of divine providence, in ordering that the laws of nature should not always proceed without interruption, but in providing that the attention of mankind should sometimes be arrested by miraculous events; since they are eminently calculated to lead the minds of men to the consideration of a superior Being, as the cause of all events, ordinary and extraordinary. Thus also is evident the folly and ignorance of those who think all miraculous events to be so absurd, as to be in their own nature incredible, and therefore that no evidence in their favour can deserve the least attention. If the reverence of mankind for their maker be of any use, or of any consequence to their happiness, which undoubtedly it is, occasional miracles have the greatest propriety, and therefore great antecedent credibility, though all the particular facts require very circumstantial evidence, because they are not of frequent occurrence.

I now come to draw some practical inferences from the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus.

Such is the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, exclusive of the general evidence of christianity, or of the miracles of Jesus, and those of the apostles after him, which are also another confirmation

ation of the truth of this one great event. And, surely, it appears that the circumstances attending the resurrection of Jesus were so ordered by divine providence, that it is not in the power of man to imagine any change in them that, according to the known laws of evidence, would make it more credible than it is with respect to distant ages. Every objection that has hitherto been made to this evidence has led to a more rigorous examination of the circumstances; and the consequence of this, has always been an addition of light upon the evidence, and a greater confirmation of it. We are therefore abundantly authorized to consider our faith as *founded upon a rock*, which no future objection will be able to shake.

Since, therefore, we may consider it as a certain and unquestionable fact, that *Christ is risen from the dead*, we may likewise, with the apostle, consider him as *the first fruits of them that sleep*, or that his resurrection is a pledge and assurance of our own, which it is the great object of christianity to inforce. Christ is called the *first fruits*, and these are the forerunners of a general harvest. *Afterwards*, says the apostle, *they that are Christ's, at his coming*. For Christ has only left the present scene for a time. If there be any truth in the facts

evidence of which has now been laid before you, he will certainly come again, and that *with power and great glory*, to raise the dead, and to give unto every man according to his works.

Let us, therefore, my christian brethren, be continually looking for this great event, this *great day of God*, as it is sometimes called. For to all of us it is *nigh, even at the doors*. Long as the sleep of death may really be, it will appear to each of us to be only a moment. In death we, as it were, only shut our eyes upon this world, and immediately open them in another, with the brightest and most glorious prospects, if our conversation has been such as becomes the gospel, but with the most gloomy and dreadful ones, if this great light *hath come into the world, and we have loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil.*

The mere profession of christianity will avail us nothing, because it lays us under stronger obligations to a virtuous life, and therefore will aggravate our condemnation if we do not live as, by ranking with christians, we profess to live. Better, far better, would it be for us, at the day of judgment, to be able to say we had never heard of Christ, than *naming the name of Christ*, or professing his religion, not to have been thereby led to *depart from iniquity*, and

and to be to him *a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

Christianity is much less to be considered as a system of doctrines, than as a rule of practice. Nay the doctrines themselves (the chief of which is that of a future state of retribution) have no other object than the regulation of our lives. What the great duties of the christian life are, we are all sufficiently acquainted with. They are comprehended in two great precepts, the first of which is the love of God with all our hearts, implying an entire and chearful devotedness to his will, in doing and in suffering, in life and in death. And the second is the loving of our neighbour as ourselves, implying a readiness, in all cases, to do to others as we should think it right that they should do to us. We should all habitually consider one another as brethren, the children of the same great universal parent, the care of the same benevolent providence, as training up in the same school of moral discipline here, and as heirs together of the same glorious hope of eternal life hereafter.

To fit us for these devotional and social duties, we should also be careful to exercise a constant government over our appetites and passions, that,

as the apostle says, we may preserve ourselves as the *unpolluted temples of the spirit of God.*

Thus, my christian brethren, *knowing our duty, happy shall we be if we do it*; that when our Lord, after his long absence, shall return, to *take an account of his servants*, when *our eyes, and when every eye, shall see him, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming;* but having duly improved the talents committed to each of us, may hear from his mouth the joyful sentence, *Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

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THE

IMPORTANCE

OF

FREE INQUIRY.

He that hath ears to hear let him hear.
MATT. XIII. 9.

IN these words our Lord several times addressed his audience, in order to summon their utmost attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make use of their reason, in a case in which it was of the greatest consequence to apply it, and in which they were likewise capable of applying it with the greatest effect, viz. the investigation of religious truth. *Hear and understand* is another of his modes of calling the attention of his audience to the instruction that he gave them. And when he thought them deficient in their attention to his doctrine, and they did not appear to understand what he laid before them, he was not backward even in his reproaches on that account. *Are ye yet also without*

understanding? Do ye not yet understand? His language that he once made use of, evidently implying some degree of surprize and displeasure. Matt. xv. 16, 17. And even in a case of considerable difficulty, viz. the right application of scripture prophecies, he said to the two disciples going to Emmaus, *O fools, and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken.* Luke xxiv. 25.

The apostles continued the same earnest addresses to the reason of their converts, and Paul in particular gave the greatest exercise to the understandings of his hearers and readers, by very abstruse argumentation on subjects relating to religion. His epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, are chiefly argumentative; and those to the Corinthians, and some others are very much so. For, after the death of our Saviour, new cases had occurred, and new difficulties had arisen, for which the instructions he had given them were not sufficient. And had the apostles continued to live to the present day, other cases would no doubt, have occurred, in which their own reasoning powers, and those of their disciples would have found continual exercise.

Indeed, it seems to be the design of Providence that the present state should be a theatre of constant exercise

exercise and discipline, and that, not of our passions only, but also of our understandings; that we may make continual advances in knowledge, as well as in virtue; to prepare us, no doubt, for our proper sphere of action in a future world; in which, we may assure ourselves, we shall find abundant exercise, as well for the moral virtues that we acquire here, as for that habit of patient inquiry, and close investigation of truth, and likewise that candour with respect to those that differ from us, which it is our duty to acquire and cultivate here below.

Man is a creature whose distinguishing excellence is the reason which God has given him, no less than his capacity for moral virtues. The perfection of man, therefore, must consist as well in the improvement of his reason, and the acquisition of knowledge, as in the attainment of all moral virtue. We should then always keep our attention awake to every interesting subject of discussion; and whenever religious truth is directly or indirectly concerned, imagine that we hear our Saviour himself calling out to us, and saying, *He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

The subject of *free inquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and especially as one of the usual topics of the fifth of November, on which it is cus-

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The subject of *free inquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and especially as one of the usual topics of the fifth of November, on which it is cus-

tomary to call the attention of Protestants to the use of their reason in matters of religion, in order to vindicate the principles of the reformation; and also farther to assert our liberty of dissenting from the established religion of this country. This has been done so often, that many persons may think it a worn out and useless topic. They may think that the reformation has been abundantly vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but to rejoice in that liberty in which the exertions of our ancestors, and the favour of divine providence, have made us free. Dissenters also may think the principles of their dissent from the establishment of their country sufficiently vindicated, and that now, we have nothing to do, but joyfully to acquiesce in our greater liberty; only being ready to oppose all attempts that may be made to encroach upon it.

This, however, is the language of those who think they have acquired all useful religious knowledge; whereas it is probable that this will never be the situation of man, not even in a future world, and much less in this. In nature we see no bounds to our inquiries. One discovery always gives hints of many more, and brings us into a wider field of speculation. Now why should not this be,

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in some measure, the case with respect to knowledge of a moral and religious kind? Is the compass of religious knowledge so small, as that any person, however imperfectly educated, may comprehend the whole, and without much trouble? This may be the notion of such as read or think but little on the subject. But of what value can such an opinion be?

If we look back into ecclesiastical history, (which is itself a study no less useful than it is immense, and despised by none but those who are ignorant of it) we shall see that every age, and almost every year, has had its peculiar subjects of inquiry. As one controversy has been determined, or sufficiently agitated, others have always arisen; and I will venture to say there never was a time in which there were more, or more interesting objects of discussion before us, than there are at present. And it is in vain to flatter ourselves with the prospect of seeing an end to our labours, and of having nothing to do but to sit down in the pleasing contemplation, of all religious truth, and reviewing the intricate mazes through which we have happily traced the progress of every error.

If, indeed, we confine ourselves to things that are *necessary to salvation*, we may stop whenever we please,

please, and may even save ourselves the trouble of any inquiry, or investigation at all. Because nothing is absolutely necessary to acceptance with God, and future happiness in some degree, besides the conscientious practice of the moral duties of life. *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* But, certainly, we may mislead ourselves if we restrict our enquiries by this rule, as, according to it, christianity itself may be said to be unnecessary. For do any of us think that a virtuous heathen will not be saved? Paul says, that they who are without the law of Moses shall be judged without that law. They have the law of nature, and of conscience, and will be judged by that. But, notwithstanding this, he thought it a great privilege to be a Jew, and a greater still, as it certainly is, to be a christian; and there were questions relating to christianity to which he thought it proper to give his own closest attention, and to invite the attention of others. The manner in which he addresses the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the christians of other churches, on the subject of *false doctrine*, is equal in point of energy with the language of our Saviour, *he that has ears to hear let him hear*; and that of the apostle John, in whose

whose time error had spread wider, and taken deeper root, is still stronger. Do not these great examples then, justify the most vigilant attention that we can now give to the purity of christian doctrine?

As new errors and mistakes are continually arising, it is of importance that these be corrected, even to keep the ground that we have already got; and it may well be presumed that the great corruption in doctrine, discipline, and worship, which began in the very age of the apostles, and which kept advancing for the space of near fourteen hundred years afterwards, may furnish matter for the laborious and spirited enquiries of a later period than ours. We have seen, indeed, the *dawn* of a reformation, but much remains to the light of *perfect day*; and there is nothing that we can now allege as a plea for discontinuing our researches, that might not have been said with equal plausibility at the time, by Wickliff, by Luther, or by later reformers, who stopped far short of the progress which you who now hear me have made. We think that they all left the reformation very imperfect, and why may not our posterity think the same concerning us? What peculiar right have we to say,

say to the spirit of reformation, *So far shalt thou go and no farther.*

Luther and Calvin reformed many abuses, especially in the discipline of the church, and also some gross corruptions in doctrine; but they left other things, of far greater moment, just as they found them. They disclaimed the worship of saints and angels, but they retained the worship of Jesus Christ, which led the way to it, which had the same origin, and which is an equal infringement of the honour due to the supreme God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another. Nay, the authority of the names of those reformers, who did not see this and other great errors, now serves to strengthen and confirm them. For those doctrines of original sin, predestination, atonement, and the divinity of Christ, which deserve to be numbered among the grossest of all errors, are even often distinguished by the appellation of *the doctrines of the reformation*, merely because they were not reformed by those who have got the name of *the reformers*; as if no others could have a right to it but themselves; whereas, excepting the doctrine of *atonement* (which in its full extent was an error that originated with the reformers themselves, who were led into it by an immoderate

moderate opposition to the popish doctrine of merit) they are, in fact, the doctrines of the church of Rome, which Luther and Calvin left just as they found.

It was great merit in them to go so far as they did, and it is not *they*, but *we* who are to blame, if their authority induce us to go no farther. We should rather imitate them in the boldness and spirit with which they called in question, and rectified, so many long established errors; and, availing ourselves of their labours, make farther progress than they were able to do. Little reason have we to allege their name, authority, and example, when they did a great deal, and we do nothing at all. In this, we are not imitating *them*, but those who opposed and counteracted them, willing to keep things as they were, among whom were many excellent characters, whose apprehensions at that day were the very same with those of many very good and quiet persons at present, viz. the fear of *moving foundations*, and overturning christianity itself. Their fears, we are now all sensible, were groundless, and why may not those of the present age be so too?

Dissenters, who have no creeds dictated to them by any civil governors, have, nevertheless, at this day

day no less need of such admonitions as these than members of established churches, because they may have acquired as blind an attachment to the systems in which they were educated as the members of any establishment whatever, and may be as averse to any farther improvement. Indeed, a similar temper is necessarily produced in similar circumstances, while human nature is the same in us all; and therefore a person educated a dissenter may be as much *a bigot* as any person educated a churchman, or a baptist; and if he now be what he was brought up to, the probability certainly is, that had he been educated differently, his prejudices would have been no less strong, though intirely different; so that the rigid dissenter would have been as rigid a baptist or a churchman.

No person whose opinions are not the result of his own serious inquiry can have a right to say that he is a dissenter, or any thing else, *on principle*; and no man can be absolutely sure of this, whose present opinions are the same with those that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he sees sufficient reason for them, and retains them on conviction. This, however, is all that can be expected from any man. For it would be most absurd for a man to adopt new opinions,

nions, opinions entertained by no person besides himself, merely for the sake of proving that he has actually thought for himself. But still, thinking as others have thought, and for reasons which others have given, is no *proof* of a man having thought for himself, and therefore will not authorize his censuring of others. Such a person *may* have the true spirit of inquiry, he may have exerted it, and have found the truth; but he is incapable of giving that satisfactory *evidence* of it which can be given by one, whose present sentiments are different from those in which he was educated, and which he could not have learned but from his own researches.

How few then among you who were educated dissenters can have a right to say that you would have been dissenters if you had *not* been so educated? It is more than I would presume to say concerning myself. If those persons who now dislike the spirit of innovation were to go back in history, and place themselves in every age of reformation; still censuring that spirit which always gave offence in its day (being always the rebellion of *a few* against the authority of *the many*) they could not stop till they came to the heathenism of our barbarous

barbarous ancestors. For it was the bold spirit of inquiry that made them christians.

Let all those who acquiesce in any system in which they were educated, or which they have learned from others, consider that, in censuring more modern innovators, they are censuring the *spirit* and *example* of the very persons whose opinions they have adopted, and of whose name they make their boast; and that if it had not been for that very spirit which they now censure, only exerted a century or two ago, their own opinions would have been very different from what they now are. They ought, therefore, to respect the *principle*, even though it should lead some into error. If the spirit of inquiry that carries some to Socinianism be wrong, that which carries others to Arianism is no less so; and if Arminius is to be condemned for abandoning the doctrine of Calvin, Calvin himself must be condemned for abandoning the doctrines of popery. It is the *spirit of inquiry* which, if error be established, necessarily leads to *innovation*, that every man who ranks himself with any class of christians now existing, must commend in some person or other. And if it was really commendable in the person whose opinions he adopts, it cannot be censurable in the person whose opinions

opinions he does not chuse to adopt. The same spirit of inquiry is in itself equally commendable, or equally censurable in all, and whether it lead to truth, or to error.

It will be said, Is it not possible for the spirit of inquiry and innovation to be carried too far? Does liberty never degenerate into licentiousness? Admitting this, who is the proper judge in the case, when all are equally *parties?* The Papist will say that the Protestant has gone too far, the Calvinists will say that the Arminians are to blame, Arminians will condemn the Arians, and the Arians the Unitarians, and even some Unitarians may condemn those of their body, who differing from them in some respects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter get, some other name.

In fact, there is no reason to be alarmed at all in the case. Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free scope be given to inquiry. It is very little advantage that any superiority of ability can give to the cause of error, and cannot be of long continuance; not to say that the probability must always be, that a man of superior ability will discover the truth sooner than one of inferior talents; industry, and all other qualities being equal between them.

But the consideration that will perhaps contribute most to allay the apprehensions of serious and well intentioned persons, with respect to all theological controversies, is that nothing on which future happiness depends is concerned in any of them. Much more than has yet been called in question may be given up without abandoning christianity; and every thing that has yet been done towards stripping our religion of its foreign incumbrances has contributed to making many value it the more; and consequently, by giving it a firmer hold on men's understanding and belief, tends to give it a greater influence over their affections and practice.

There are, likewise, some other considerations, by means of which those persons who are not themselves much given to speculation, and who are apt to be alarmed by the suggestions of others, may relieve themselves from the fears they entertain on these occasions. One is, that no principle or tenet is really dangerous that does not affect men's belief in the righteous moral government of God, and a state of rewards and punishments hereafter, because this is that religious principle which has the greatest influence on the conduct of men. Other principles, indeed, have an effect, in contributing

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to make us regard our governor and judge, and the maxims of his administration, with more satisfaction, and therefore may make religious obedience more pleasing, and they deserve our zeal and attachment on that account. Other principles again tend to make our religion approve itself to the reason of mankind, by removing from it what is manifestly absurd, or highly improbable and revolting; and therefore may recommend christianity to those who are at present prejudiced against it, and they deserve a large portion of our zeal on that account. But still the great thing, with respect to the professor of christianity himself, is his firm belief in a righteous moral government, and a future state of retribution, because these are the things that chiefly influence mens' conduct.

In reality, there cannot be any better rule of judging in this case than that of our Saviour, *By their fruits shall ye know them.* Consider then the tempers and conduct of those persons whose opinions are said to be dangerous. Are they worse than other persons? Have they less piety towards God, or less good will to men, or are they more indulgent to their appetites and passions? If this cannot be said of them, but on the contrary, their conduct be as unexceptionable, and exemplary, as

that of other christians, assure yourselves that there is no more real danger in their principles than in those of others. They cannot be bad principles with which men lead godly, righteous, and sober lives.

I do not, however, desire you to be determined by the observation of a single person, or of a few persons; because there may be causes of their good conduct independent of their principles; as there may be causes of bad conduct in those who hold good principles. But observe the general character of the sect, or denomination, whose principles are censured; and if it be not worse than that of others, assure yourselves that, whatever may be the vices or virtues of individuals, the general principles of the sect are not more unfavourable to virtue than those of other christians, and therefore, that there is nothing in them that ought to give you any alarm.

But if, independent of practical consequences, you consider speculative principles only, and all your fears be for *Christianity*, it should be considered that every man is a christian who believes the divine mission of Christ, and consequently the truth of his religion. And, for the reason given before, the only essential article of his religion is

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the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Who Christ himself is, personally considered, is not, of itself, of any consequence, but only whether he be sufficiently authorized by the *God of truth* to teach what he did teach in his name. If such doctrines be taught concerning Christ, personally considered, as men of sense will not readily believe, if it be insisted on that he is almighty God, the maker of the world, or any thing else that will seem to be either impossible or highly improbable (by which many persons may be indisposed to receive christianity, and especially the great bodies of Jews and Mahometans, who keep strictly to that most important doctrine of the *unity of God*) every rational christian ought on that account, as well as others, to exert himself to refute such notions, and to prevent the spread of them. But still we ought to bear in mind, that any man is intitled to the appellation of *a christian* who believes that Christ (whether he was himself God, or man, or something between God or man) had a commission from God, that he died and rose again; and who, in consequence of it, expects a general resurrection and a life of retribution to come.

But should free inquiry lead to the destruction of christianity itself, it ought not on that account to

be discontinued. For we can only wish for the prevalence of christianity on the supposition of its being *true*; and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true. But every man who is himself a serious believer in christianity, must have the most perfect confidence in its truth. He can have no doubt of its being able to stand the test of the most rigorous examination, and consequently he can have no motive to be unwilling to submit it to that test. None can well be enemies to free inquiry but those who, not believing christianity, or at least strongly suspecting that it may not be true, yet wish to support it for some private and interested considerations; like those who lived by the trade of making shrines for the goddess Diana, who were interested in the support of her worship at all events, whether they themselves believed in her divinity or not, because by *that craft they got their wealth*. But this is an argument that cannot much affect any besides members of civil establishments of religion. You, my brethren, have no interest whatever in the support of christianity; if it be false; and your ministers very little. We, therefore, as dissenters, shall be absolutely inexcusable if we be not friends to free inquiry in its utmost

most extent, and if we do not give the most unbounded scope to the use of our reason in matters of religion. It is the great principle on which our cause rests, and without which it can never be worth supporting at all.

By all means, then, be so far consistent, as christians, as protestants, and as dissenters as to give the greatest encouragement to free inquiry in matters of religion. Do you, who have leisure and capacity, study the subject of religion, the nature of its evidences, and every circumstance relating to it. No subjects of inquiry or speculation, within the reach of the human faculties, are so great and interesting as those which, in the most distant manner, relate to the revelation of the will of God to men, respecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. The ultimate object of the whole scheme gives a dignity to comparatively little things belonging to it; and no studies, are in their nature, capable of becoming more pleasing and satisfying to the mind than those of theology. For this I may venture to appeal to the experience of all those who, in consequence of having a taste for these studies, as well as others, and of having made real proficiency in both, are the only competent judges in the case. Their being the chosen

studies of Newton and Locke, for the greater and more valuable part of their lives, clearly shews that they considered them as superior to those of mathematics and natural philosophy in the one case, and of metaphysicks, and various other liberal pursuits, in the other. Compared with this testimony, so emphatically given, by the actual employment of their time, how contemptible is the opinion of men whose studies have been confined to polite literature, natural science, or that of men of the world, who cannot pretend to any knowledge of the subject on which they pass their hasty censures. You who have fortune, but little leisure, or capacity, for such inquiries yourselves, at least encourage them in others. Give assistance to their labours, and you will have a better right to enjoy the fruits of them, though you may not be qualified, in any other respect, to contribute to their success.

Do you, in general, who are private members of christian societies be, at least, so far the friends of free inquiry, as to throw no obstructions in the way of it. Allow your ministers the liberty that you take yourselves, and take no umbrage if, in consequence of giving more attention to matters of theology than you have leisure, for, they should entertain

entertain opinions different from yours, provided that your agreement on the whole be such, as that their services are useful and edifying to you. After a laborious and perhaps hazardous course of inquiry, of the difficulties of which you can hardly be aware, it is no great hardship upon you to give them at least a dispassionate and attentive hearing. They cannot *force* any opinions upon you. You will still have the power of judging for yourselves; and without hearing you cannot have even the means of forming a right judgment. And where an agreement cannot be had (and few persons who really think for themselves will agree in *all* things), you may exercise that mutual candour, which is of more value than any agreement in speculation.

If your ministers be men of sense, and have any knowledge of human nature, they will not trouble you, from such a place, as this, with speculations into which you cannot enter, or the discussion of questions that are not of some importance to our common christianity. But you may easily suppose, that, giving more attention to speculative religion than you have leisure to do, they may see the importance of certain articles in a stronger light than you will at first be aware of; and that will justify them to themselves, and ought to justify

tify them to you, if they propose those articles with such evidence as strikes their minds in their favour, and with a zeal which they may think they deserve. It is indeed their duty, in the sight of God, to inculcate upon you whatever they shall think to be of importance to you, as members of christian societies, whether you receive it well or ill.

There are many things which they may think to be highly interesting *in speculation*, and proper for your consideration in your closets, which they would not think of proposing promiscuously from the pulpit, not being of sufficient importance, and the minds of all not being sufficiently prepared for them. But there are some errors of a speculative nature, such as those respecting the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, which have taken deep root among common christians, and which are perpetually inculcated from other pulpits, with respect to which it becomes us to oppose zeal to zeal; and every man who has *ears to hear*, should be called upon to *hear and understand*; because every man who has ears to hear, and the most common understanding may be made to see the absurdity and the mischievous consequences of such doctrines. The minds, therefore, of the

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commonest people ought to be enlightened, and their zeal excited, with respect to them. Let it appear that we, as well as others, despise what we think to be despisable, and abhor what we think to be shocking.

Let those, on the other hand, who are bold in speculation, bear with those who are not so, especially those who are in years, and who have not been much in the habit of diligent inquiry. God does not give the same disposition to every man; nor indeed does the purpose of his providence admit of it. Long prejudices are also always, or at least generally, to be treated with tenderness. Besides, as it is happy for the cause of truth that some should be forward in speculation, it is no less happy that others should be backward to receive new opinions; as, in consequence of this, every thing is more thoroughly canvassed; and it is only after a due course of discussion, in which every objection shall be brought forth, that there can be any probability that the reception of any truth will be lasting. A truth that has never been opposed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering assent, which is given to that which has stood the test of a rigorous examination.

As

As we call upon every man that has ears to *hear*, that is, to *judge*, we must be prepared patiently to bear with the result of that judgment, whatever it is. If we invite examination and discussion, we should take the consequences of it, without complaining. If the cause for which we contend be a good one, it will stand its ground; and if otherwise, we ourselves ought to rejoice in the fall of it.

To conclude, whether, in searching after truth, or in judging of it, let us give one another all the aid and assistance that we can; remembering that we are all frail and fallible creatures, liable to mistakes, and to faults more dangerous than any mistakes. Let it, therefore, be our greatest care *to provoke unto love and to good works, to exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

With respect to *opinions*, the time is coming that will try every man's work what it is, whether we are now building upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with suitable and durable materials, or such as will not bear the fire. And, with respect both to speculation and practice, let it be our great object so to acquit ourselves here below, in the absence of our Lord, that when he shall return,

turn, and take an account of his servants, we may be found of him without spot and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

FINIS.

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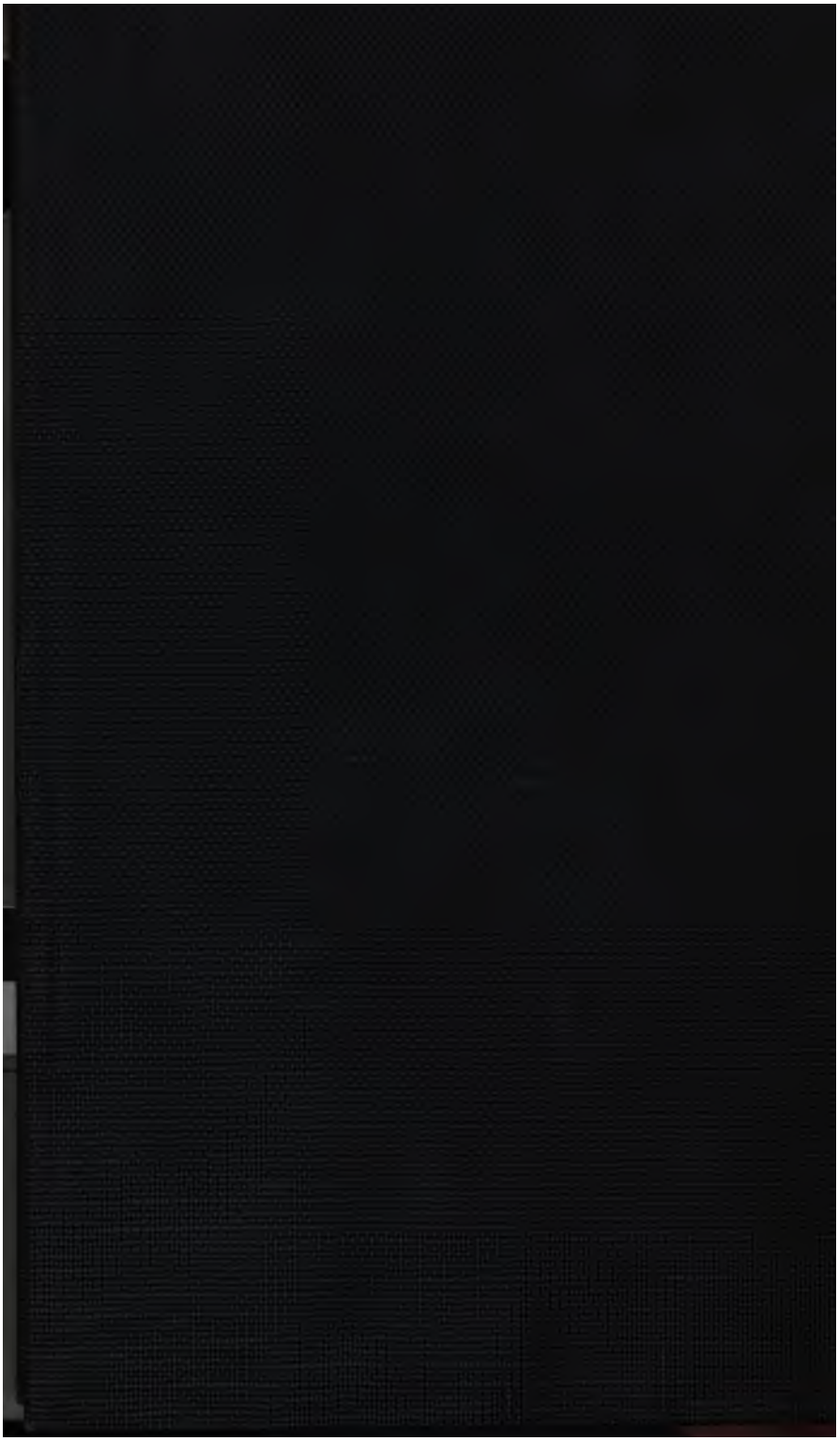
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